Rev. 04/24/97 (Blue)
Rev. 07/01/97 (Pink)
Rev. 08/04/97 (Yellow)

MIDNIGHT IN THE GARDEN OF GOOD AND EVIL

Screenplay adaptation by

John Lee Hancock

No portion of this script may be performed, reproduced, or used by any means, or quoted or published in any medium without the prior written consent of Warner Bros.

WARNER BROS.
4000 Warner Boulevard
Burbank, California 91522

April 21, 1997
© 1997
WARNER BROS.
All Rights Reserved

FADE IN:

1 EXT. OLD BONAVENTURE CEMETERY - GRAVE SITE MEMORIAL STATUE - DAY 1

Old Bonaventure Cemetery, truly wondrous -- ancient oaks dripping with moss. A grave site memorial statue is prominent. It's a young girl in a full-length dress, head tilted and arms outstretched from the elbow, each hand holding a bird feeder dish. As we MOVE IN ON her face we see her look is kind, yet displaced. *

DISSOLVE TO: *

2 SERIES OF SHOTS (SAVANNAH, GEORGIA) 2

A) EXT. OGELTHORPE SQUARE

Politely-dressed garden club members eye a 75-foot oak tree, while, across the street, a docent welcomes tourists into the Owens-Thomas house.

B) EXT. JOHNSON SQUARE

Home of the financial district and Christ Episcopal Church. A coffee vendor sells from his cart, men in suits move quickly, briefcases in hand, and two old-timers share stories from WWI.

C) EXT. ROW HOUSES

Wrought iron gates separating them from the street. A mailman drops letters at every one.

3 EXT. FORSYTH PARK - DAY 3

"The big park" -- A few bums and dog-walkers share the park with a large cop on horseback. Two well-dressed women make their way to afternoon tea. As they pass a bench we HOLD ON a woman pulling items from an oversize bag -- a bone, a feather, a bag of dirt, a decanter of blue liquid. She's in her 60's, a toothless black woman, gray hair in a bun except for two little pigtails, one hanging over each ear. She wears a cotton dress stretched tight over her round body and a pair of wire-rimmed, purple shades. Her name's MINERVA and there's no way in hell to forget her.

A squirrel jumps up onto her bench, hoping for a handout.

MINERVA
Quit eyeballin' me, Flavius. I knew you when you wuz a two-bit hustler on Bull Street. *

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED: 3

She hisses like a deranged cat and the squirrel scampers.

We hear a sound, a RUMBLING. Minerva hears it, too. A PLANE. She looks up, the smile on her face saying she was expecting this plane. Then her smile gives way to a cackle and an ominous shake of her head.

HER POV

over HAUNTING LAUGHTER -- a small plane descends.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (V.O.)
-- Now beginnin' our descent into Savannah.

4 INT. AIRPLANE - DAY 4

A man, reading Town and Country, adjusts his seat to upright. His name's JOHN KELSO -- late 20s, with intense eyes that belie his boyish features. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT, 20s, hair fixed just so, spots John reading.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
That's my grandmother's favorite magazine.

JOHN
I don't normally read it, but... I'm writing a piece for them.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
You're a writer.
(off his nod)
Where from?

JOHN
New York. Manhattan. *

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
You ever written a book? *

JOHN
Yes... actually.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Really?!...

She sits on the armchair of the empty seat across the aisle. John, sensing that he's doing well, reaches in his knapsack and hands over a book.

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED: 4

JOHN
I noticed it in here after I came on board. I don't make a habit of carrying copies...

She eyes the book, with a puzzled look. A kid, four, stands on his seat in front and stares at John.

JOHN
Came out two... three years ago.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Whatever is it about?

JOHN
The, um, decline of manners as a precursor and/or parallel to the demise of civilizations and empires.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Oh, okay...

If she was puzzled before, now she's totally confused. She hands the book back.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I'm kinda partial to romance novels.

She smiles and retreats. John looks at his book, then stuffs it back in the knapsack. The kid in front stares at John, then yawns.

5 EXT. SAVANNAH AIRPORT - DRIVE THROUGH - DAY 5

John stands, luggage in hand, and looks for a cab. None. Only a red double-decker tour bus. The BUS DRIVER helps a few passengers get onboard. John strides over. *

JOHN
Where do I grab a cab?

BUS DRIVER
Just left. You can call the company but I's you, I'd just wait on him to come back. Unless...

6 INT./EXT. TOUR BUS - DAY 6

John rides on top of the bus with other passengers -- tourists dressed in straw boaters and colorful shirts. John notices passing signs on the side of the road...

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED: 6

SIGN

"Savannah City Limit." A second sign: "Welcome!" Graffiti scrawled at the bottom says: "Yankee Go Home!"

7 EXT. DOWNTOWN SAVANNAH - DAY 7

The bus comes to a stop near Washington Square.

BUS DRIVER
(over P.A.)
To the left is Washington Square, to the right, The Pirate's House, built in 1794. All the ne'er do wells and scalawags divided up their booty there.

John makes his way to the front of the bus. A lurch almost tosses him overboard. John regains his balance and climbs down into the lower deck, next to the driver.

JOHN
Are we anywhere near Jones Street?

BUS DRIVER
A tunnel from the house to the river allowed for quick getaways.
(to John)
We're still a way's away. Sit back and enjoy yerself.

8 EXT. MADISON SQUARE - DAY (LATER) 8

The bus stops.

9 INT. BUS - DAY (SAME TIME) 9

John, in a seat behind the driver, checks his watch.

BUS DRIVER
(into mic)
Madison Square, built in 1837. Sherman stayed in the Green-Meldrim House to rest up after his fiery march through Atlanta. Was gonna burn Savannah, too, but the locals drowned him in Chatham Artillery punch and fancy parties until he decided to spare our fair city.
(before John can ask)
We're workin' that direction. *

10 EXT. FORSYTH PARK - DAY (LATER) 10

The tour bus pulls up and stops.

BUS DRIVER (V.O.)
(over P.A.)
Forsyth Park, called 'the big park' by locals. It was laid out in 1851 and named for John Forsyth, minister to Spain, governor of Georgia and a serious card shark.

11 INT. BUS - DAY (SAME TIME) 11

BUS DRIVER
(into mic)
The center fountain was the largest in the nation when it was unveiled in 1858. Now, I'm gonna let you folks stretch your legs before we resume our tour.

All the passengers start to exit in search of beer and key lime pie. John pushes past two of them up to the driver.

JOHN
We're stopping?!

BUS DRIVER
Jus' a few minutes. Have you there in no time.

JOHN
Which direction?

BUS DRIVER
Coupla blocks north, but --
(as John's gone)
You wanna refund?...

12 OMITTED 12

12A EXT. FORSYTH PARK - DAY 12A

John, suitcase and satchel in hand, moves past the tourists and through the park.

13 EXT. MONTEREY SQUARE - DAY 13

John walks along Bull Street and into Monterey Square. He hears ORGAN MUSIC coming from MERCER HOUSE, the most beautiful home on the square.

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED: 13

DOGS BARK at the bombastic, ECHOING NOTES.

On the street beside the house, a YOUNG MAN washes his black Camaro. He's rough-hewn but sinewy, handsome, even lusty, but dirty. He stretches to remove his T-shirt, revealing a tattoo of a Confederate flag on his arm.

John walks slowly by, staring at the tattoo. The Young Man turns, smiles, leans against the car, sticks a thumb in his waistband and gives John a come-hither look.

YOUNG MAN
Hey... you lookin' for somethin'?

There's something about the guy that makes John stop. The ORGAN MUSIC DIES. John's eyes go to the second floor of the house. A silhouette moves INTO VIEW at the window and stands there. *

John feels a sudden chill, shakes his head, turns and walks away. The Young Man watches him go.

14 EXT. JONES STREET - DAY 14

A block of restored homes. John checks an address.

VOICE (O.S.)
Mr. Kelso? Are you Mr. Kelso?

An elderly lady, MRS. BAXTER, waves from the porch of her lovely row house. John nods and walks over.

MRS. BAXTER
I'm Lorene Baxter. Welcome to Savannah. Town and Country is my favorite magazine.
(off his smile) *
My lands, where are my manners? *
What can I get you to drink?

15 EXT. BACK YARD - DAY 15

Mrs. Baxter and John, tumblers in hand, cross the back yard to the carriage house in the rear.

MRS. BAXTER
Mr. Williams restored this home. *
One of the many he saved from the
wreckin' ball. The carriage house *
is reserved for Jim's clients and
guests, such as yourself.

16 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - DAY 16

Small but lovely, furnished with antiques. John enters with Mrs. Baxter.

JOHN
Thank you. This is great.

MRS. BAXTER
I'm so happy. Well, you have a pleasant stay. *

She remembers something and hands over an envelope.

MRS. BAXTER
Jim said I should give you this.
(beat)
Mr. Kelso, if you don't mind me askin', are you, by any chance, single?

JOHN
Um, why?

MRS. BAXTER
My niece is in the Married Women's Card Club. It's a Savannah * institution, and there are several * members that have daughters -- beautiful girls, talented, too. I thought perhaps...

JOHN
I'll only be here a couple of days.

MRS. BAXTER
Well, you never know.

JOHN
What do you mean, 'you never know'?

MRS. BAXTER
Unless you ask, of course.

She leaves and John sits down, stares at the envelope and takes a sip from the tumbler. He winces -- strong -- then stares at the gold-embossed envelope on which his name is written in ornate gold calligraphy. He opens it. * It's a party invitation. *

17 EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - DAY 17

A beautiful residence serving as office for Savannah's most prestigious law firm -- Bouhan, Williams and Levy. John makes his way up the steps.

18 INT. LAW OFFICES - DAY 18

John enters a beautiful marble lobby and takes it in. The pretty RECEPTIONIST announces on the intercom...

RECEPTIONIST
He's here.

Before John can respond, BETTY HARTY, 60, a grandmother with the face of a 13-year-old girl, enters the lobby.

BETTY
Welcome, Mr. Kelso. I'm Betty Harty. Sonny's been expecting you.

JOHN
I'm here to see Jim Williams.

BETTY
Sonny is Jim's attorney.

19 INT. SONNY SEILER'S OFFICE - DAY 19

Grand. Marble floors and butter rich, hand-carved 18th-century furniture. Betty leads John in to greet SONNY SEILER -- 55, a seersucker suit covering his barrel chest. He's on the phone but offers a hand.

SONNY
Well, hell, coach, come on in. Welcome to our ol' curiosity shop. Have a seat. Be right with ya.
(into phone)
Uh huh... Uh huh... Uh huh...

John looks around. On the walls hang portraits in gold frames. They could be from Buckingham Palace, except for one thing: Every one is of a different white bulldog. Bronze plaques identify them as: UGA I... through IV. *

SONNY
(into phone)
Uh huh. Well, lemme know.
(hangs up and smiles)
How was your trip?

JOHN
Fine, thanks. Mr. Williams said -- *

SONNY
-- He'll be along. We need to handle a little bidness beforehand.

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED: 19

Sonny nods to Betty, who hands over a document. Sonny slides it to John, who looks it over, confused.

SONNY
Boiler plate stuff. Confidentiality agreement plus a paragraph outlining Jim's editorial privilege. Protects us from yella journalism. *

JOHN
(confused)
Town and Country flew me down to write a 500-word story on a Christmas party.

BETTY
It's not just any party.

JOHN
Have you broached this with the magazine?

SONNY
I'd rather have your word than some New York lawyer.

JOHN
Be that as it may, I'm not signing anything.

SONNY
Damn, how come? It's just a lil' ol' party write-up.

JOHN
All the more reason not to compromise my ethics. It's a slippery slope. As a professional I'm sure you understand that.

Sonny sizes John up, then nods.

SONNY
You promise to be fair?

JOHN
Yes. Of course.

Sonny offers his hand, wanting to shake on it. John looks at Sonny for a few seconds then stands and shakes hands.

INTERCOM (V.O.)
-- Mr. Williams is here.

20 INT. LOBBY - DAY 20

A man stands, staring at a large portrait, his BACK TO us. Then he slowly turns. He's tall, thin, darkly handsome; in his 50's with a neatly trimmed mustache, hair turning silver at the temples and eyes so black they're like the tinted windows of a sleek limousine -- he can see out but you can't see in. JIM WILLIAMS. He puffs on a cigarillo, smiles and offers a hand. John takes it. Jim holds onto it, shaking slowly, firmly. *

JIM
(a drawl like velvet)
Let's take a walk, shall we, sport?

21 EXT. LAW OFFICES - DAY 21

John and Jim make their way down the steps into a beautiful sunny day.

A man, MR. GLOVER, 75, black, dressed in an old suit, stands on the sidewalk, holding a dog leash in his hand. There is, however, no dog in the leash.

Betty exits the door behind them, dragging a white bulldog, UGA IV, on a leash. *

BETTY
Would ya'll mind...?

JIM
Not at all, Betty.

She releases the leash and Uga runs to John. Jim smiles. John reluctantly reaches down and picks up the leash.

22 EXT. FORSYTH PARK - DAY 22

People picnic; a local cop sits on a mare, still as a statue. Mr. Glover, not much for talk, shuffles a few yards in front of Jim and John.

JIM
Did you sign Sonny's papers?

JOHN
Actually, no.

JIM
Good for you. Sonny is overly protective of my interests.

A MAN walks by.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: 22

PASSER-BY (MAN)
Still walkin' the dog, Mr. Glover?

MR. GLOVER
Yessir. Patrick do like his mornin' walk.

John stares at both of them and eyes the empty dog leash. A PRETTY GIRL slides up next to John.

PRETTY GIRL
Would you mind, could I... could I have my picture taken with Uga?

Before John can object, the Girl whips out a camera and hands it over. Jim takes a seat on a bench and lights a cigarillo, smiling.

The Girl kneels down beside Uga, who, on cue, lifts his chin as if posing for yet another royal portrait. John snaps the photo and hands back the camera and walks away.

PRETTY GIRL
Damn good dog.

JIM
No matter what we do, neither of us will ever be as famous as Uga.
(off John's look)
He's the University mascot -- 'the Georgia bulldog.'

Jim motions for John to join him on the bench. He does. * Mr. Glover keeps moving down the sidewalk.

JOHN
I'll probably regret asking, but that man said he was walking a dog. What dog?

JIM
Mr. Glover was the law firm porter. Mr. Bouhan's will left * instructions that Mr. Glover should continue to be paid 15 dollars a week to walk Patrick, his Labrador.

JOHN
Sooo... where's Patrick?

JIM
Patrick went to his rewards two * years after Mr. Bouhan, in... '74. *

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: (2) 22

JOHN
The dog's dead?

JIM
Quite.

JOHN
So why can't Mr. Glover walk Uga?

JIM
(with a sly smile)
Then who'd walk Patrick? *

23 EXT. MONTEREY SQUARE - DAY 23

John, Jim and Uga cross the square and head for Mercer House. Caterers carry platters through the front door as a floral truck pulls up and begins unloading garlands. *

JOHN
This house is yours? * *

JIM
Built by General Hugh Mercer in 1860. His great-grandson was Johnny Mercer.

JOHN
The song-writer?

JIM
Savannah's own. What's your favorite of his tunes? *

JOHN
My mother liked 'Fools Rush In.'

JIM
Indeed. I'd take you inside but they're still setting up for the party tonight.

JOHN
I thought it was tomorrow night?

JIM
There are two parties. Tonight is for bachelors. Gentlemen only.

JOHN
Well, should I cover it, too?

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED: 23

JIM
I'm afraid it's private. Would you like to see my shop? It's in the carriage house.

24 EXT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - DAY 24

Uga stands at the door, his leash tied to the door.

25 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - DAY 25

Jim turns on a light. The room is full to overflow with antiques and paintings -- some mid-restoration, some still in crates. John eyes a painting. *

JOHN
This landscape, is it a Stubbs? *

JIM
Good eye.

JOHN
My father was a dealer.

JIM
It's called Newmarket Heath with a Rubbing-down House. A recent purchase. * *

The painting -- a landscape of a barn set against a lonely hillside. It seems off-center. *

JOHN
It's an odd piece.

JIM
Yes. The impasto is interesting.

John notices something in the painting.

JOHN
Where's your black-lite?

Jim smiles as if a secret is out, hands over a hand-held light and shuts off the overhead chandelier. John holds the black-lite to the painting. Jim leans in. Their faces, side by side, glow. * *

The painting under black-lite -- There seems to be a design of some kind under the thinnest of the paint. *

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED: 25

JOHN
It's an 'over-paint.'

JIM
Very good, sport.

JOHN
Had it X-rayed yet?

JIM
No.

JOHN
Then how will you know what it's obscuring? *

JIM
I rather enjoy not knowing.

John looks at Jim, who smiles. *

DISSOLVE TO:

26 EXT. MERCER HOUSE - WIDE SHOT - NIGHT 26

Lit up. A few men in tuxedos exit cars and make their way up to the door. Jim opens the door and greets them.

John, hidden in the shadows of the square, watches for a few moments, then turns to walk home.

27 INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 27

John, in boxers and T-shirt, gargles mouthwash. PIANO MUSIC wafts into the room. John walks to the window.

HIS POV

two doors down -- a steady stream of people enter a yellow house, the source of the MUSIC.

BACK TO SCENE

John closes the window, digs in his bag for a CASSETTE and sticks it in a DECK. NEW YORK CITY TRAFFIC NOISE emanates from the SPEAKERS. John smiles and crawls into bed.

DISSOLVE TO:

28 INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (LATER) 28

John awake, stares at the ceiling. "JEEPERS CREEPERS" BANGS from the IVORIES down the block. John glances at the clock: 2 A.M. He sits up and glares out the window.

HIS POV

Much as before -- all lights on, silhouetting at least a dozen people laughing and singing.

Then the PIANO MUSIC STOPS on a dime and the party house goes completely dark.

BACK TO SCENE

John watches for a few seconds more then crawls back into bed. As soon as he's settled there's a KNOCK at the door.

JOHN
Who, who is it?

WOMAN (O.S.)
Mandy.

John turns on a light and moves to the closed door.

JOHN
I don't believe I know a Mandy.

MANDY (WOMAN) (O.S.)
Course not. You won't open the damn door.

He hesitates, then unchains and opens the door. There stands MANDY NICHOLLS, 20's, holding an ice bucket. She's a true Southern beauty -- skin as smooth as silk, the aquamarine eyes of a child and the body of a woman, which we can see quite well because she's dressed (draped) in only a white cotton sheet.

MANDY
Nice ta meet ya. Ya'll got some ice?

When she smiles, John's knees almost lock. She enters.

MANDY
Joe Odom's fridge is on the blink, plus, well, at present, we don't have electricity.

(CONTINUED)

28 CONTINUED: 28

John suddenly becomes aware of his boxers and makes a lame attempt at covering himself.

JOHN
Help yourself. The --

But she's already at the refrigerator, filling the bucket.

MANDY
Thirsty?

JOHN
Me? No, not really.

MANDY
If you're thirsty a drink'll cure it. If you're not, a drink'll prevent it.

She glides past him to the door, filled bucket in hand.

MANDY
Prevention's better than cure. Put on some pants, John Kelso.

29 EXT. JONES STREET - NIGHT 29

Mandy and John walk down to 16 Jones Street, where a group of people are congregated out front. *
*

JOE ODOM, 30s, rests on his knees at the center of the group. He wears rubber gloves to his elbows as he works, trying to splice electric lines together.

JOHN
(to Mandy) *
Joe Odom?

MANDY
The one, the only.

Joe makes the final connection and a shower of sparks jumps from the married cables. The lights to the house next door dim, then, as they resume strength, the lights in Joe's house blink on. Everyone cheers.

Joe stands, brushes his pants and raises his glass.

JOE
To Savannah Power and Light and to...
(toasts neighbor)
... whoever.

30 INT. JOE ODOM'S - NIGHT 30

Packed. In the kitchen, Mandy sits on a stool having her hair trimmed by JERRY, late 20's. (That's why she was wearing a sheet.) Joe sits at the piano, playing. A crystal punch bowl full of red liquid rests on top of the piano. John takes a sip from his glass. Strong.

JOE
Chatham Artillery punch. Three parts fruit, seven parts liquor; whatever's available on both counts.

JOHN
This is a nice place.

JOE
The fella that owns it is in Europe for a year. Asked me to check in on it for him, water the plants.

John spots a dead ficus in a pot doubling as an ashtray.

JOHN
You're squatting?

JOE
Vicious word. You're not a lawyer, are you?

JOHN
Uh, no.

JOE
Good for you. Scum of the earth. I should know, bein' an ex-barrister myself.

JOHN
Ex...?

JOE
Ceremoniously disbarred nigh two years ago. Lil' accounting snafu.

JOHN
So what do you do now?

JOE
Me'n Mandy are gonna open a piano bar.

JOHN
I'd say you already have one.

(CONTINUED)

30 CONTINUED: 30

Mandy walks by with her new 'do -- not much different, but there was nothing wrong with the way she looked before.

JOE
A coif befitting your stature as the future ex Mrs. Joe Odom. *

MANDY
(as she passes)
Keep dreamin'.

JOE
Gawd, she is one beautiful creature.

JOHN
You two are engaged?

JOE
Not yet.

John finishes his drink.

JOHN
Well, I should go.

Joe dips a plastic cup in the punch and hands it to John.

JOE
Joe's Rule #2: If you have to leave a party, always take a 'traveler.'

JOHN
What's rule #1?

JOE
Never leave a party?

31 EXT. ODOM'S HOUSE - NIGHT 31

John exits the front door and sees Mandy sitting by herself on the steps. Inside, a MELLOW TUNE STARTS UP.

MANDY
It's better to be just on the edge of a party, don't ya think?

JOHN
Yeah, well, thanks for inviting me.

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED: 31

MANDY
Anytime. Every time.

He walks away, stops, turns. She's smiling, as if she knew he'd turn.

JOHN
Um, earlier, how'd you know my name?

MANDY
Welcome to Savannah.

32 INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - DAY 32

John skims the paper and drinks a cup of coffee. Eyes still on the page, he presses the speaker button on the phone and punches numbers.

COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)
(over speaker)
You have no messages.

He hangs up the phone, sets the paperwork aside and ventures a peek out the window to Joe Odom's. All quiet.

A KNOCK at the door. John hesitates for a moment, then walks over and opens it. A DELIVERY MAN stands there, holding a zippered hanging bag.

DELIVERY MAN
Mr. John Kelso?

John nods and the Man hands over the bag and walks away. John closes the door, hangs the bag on a hook and unzips it. Inside is a beautiful tuxedo.

John stares for a moment then spots an attached note. It reads: "See you tonight, Sport."

33 EXT. JONES STREET - NIGHT 33

John, wearing the tux, makes his way across the yard past Joe Odom's house, which is mysteriously quiet.

MANDY (O.S.)
Didn't figure you for a blue-blood.

John stops, looks up... spots Mandy sitting on the roof outside her bedroom window.

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED: 33

JOHN
You're not going to the party?

MANDY
I can see it from here. That's as close as I care to be.

JOHN
Just on the edge, right?
(beat)
I'm leaving tomorrow morning so... good-bye.

MANDY
I'm sorry but that just won't do. Doesn't give us time to grow on ya.

John chuckles and walks away, throwing a glance or two over his shoulder as he goes.

34 INT. MERCER HOUSE - NIGHT 34

Multiply the beauty of the exterior by ten and you'll understand how exquisite is the interior. Double doors open onto a front-to-back hallway with huge rooms on either side and a spiral staircase in the middle.

John walks through the open front door and takes in the sight. A BLACK WOMAN in her 50s enters the hallway.

WOMAN
Mr. Kelso?

JOHN
Yes.

WOMAN
I'm Lucille Wright. I cater Jim's parties. He'll be down shortly. Can I show you what we're serving? *

35 INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT 35 *

John, notepad in hand, jots notes as Lucille walks him through a vast array of delicacies on trays.

LUCILLE
(on the move)
Squash, okra, baked oysters -- my recipe -- smoked ham, roast lamb... *

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED: 35

A YOUNG MAN with a camera enters and shakes John's hand.

YOUNG MAN
Jeff Braswell. I shoot Jim's parties.

JOHN
Great. Get a shot of the whole spread.

Lucille feeds John a bite of something.

JOHN
That's good. Really good.

LUCILLE
Pumpkin cornbread. Mr. Williams insists on low country cookin' at his parties. Oh, you're gonna have fun tonight.

JIM (O.S.)
Indeed he will, Lucille.

John turns to see Jim standing in the doorway. He's wearing an elegant black tux with an ornate red Christmas vest. Not a wrinkle in sight.

JIM
(eyeing John's tux)
Good fit. 42 long. *
(before John can ask)
I have an eye for that kind of thing.

36 EXT. MERCER HOUSE - NIGHT (LATER) 36

Elegant lights make the house pretty as a postcard. Mercedes and Cadillacs line the street. Groups of party-goers make their way into the house. *

37 INT. MERCER HOUSE - SAME TIME - NIGHT 37 *

The place is packed -- tuxes on the men, evening gowns on the ladies. Everyone is drinking; everyone is chatting.

A grand piano sits in the drawing room. EMMA KELLEY, 70, the songstress of Savannah, bangs on the keys and sings. She spots someone and breaks into a rendition of "Fools Rush In." Then she winks at...

37 CONTINUED: 37

JOHN

Standing in the corner. How did...? He accepts a flute of champagne. A slightly-disheveled gentleman, HARRY CRAM, in his 80s, shakes his hand...

HARRY
Evenin', John.
(spots another guest)
Ah, our emerald bird has arrived. *

SERENA DAWES, 70s, slides through the front door, wrapped in a green feather boa with fingernails, toenails and eye shadow to match. She offers a hand for Harry to kiss.

John watches as Serena, swarmed by guests, grabs a flute of champagne from a passing tray. Jim notes John's amusement.

JIM
(sotto; to John)
Serena Dawes, a celebrated beauty in her day. When her tycoon husband died, she moved back to Savannah and created a museum to herself in her boudoir.
(moving; to Serena)
Serena, how lovely to see you out of bed!

SERENA
Why, Jim, I'd get out of bed for you anytime.
(beat)
Harry was about to show us the latest contribution to his arsenal.

Harry pulls a pistol from his jacket pocket. The group leans in for a look. Sonny joins the crowd.

SERENA
Oh, it's a .25. My late husband blew his brains out with one of those.

ANOTHER WOMAN
So did mine. I was fixing myself a drink, 'Gunsmoke' was on T.V., and I heard a shot. I thought it was part of the show, until I walked in and saw Lyman, bleeding, sprawled in his favorite chair.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

37 CONTINUED: (2) 37

ANOTHER WOMAN (CONT'D)
Everyone knew our marriage was a disaster. If I'd so much as touched the gun they'd have charged me with murder.

SERENA
Someday I <u>will</u> shoot a man.

Serena reaches into her ample bosom and plucks out a pearl-handled derringer. With the pistol in hand, she reaches out and grabs another drink from a passing tray. Everyone ducks or moves away from the barrel's aim.

John, too, moves to avoid, and drifts past a still-smiling, still playing Emma. Jim touches his elbow.

JIM
Which conversation shall we join?

JOHN
The one least likely to involve gunfire.

Jim laughs heartily. Mrs. Wright motions for Jim.

JIM
Excuse me for a moment.

John slides away from the crowd and into the empty end of the drawing room. Elegant portraits of European and American aristocrats painted by Gainsborough, Hudson, Reynolds, and Whistler stare down at him.

John spots an <u>Architectural Digest</u> on the table. The cover photo is of this very room! John chuckles, looks up at the coat of arms on the wall.

JIM (O.S.)
From Napoleon's coronation carriage.

John turns to see Jim standing there. *

JOHN
You have an impressive collection.

JIM
It's not a collection. It's my home.

JOHN
(touching a box)
Faberge?

(CONTINUED)

37 CONTINUED: (3) 37

JIM
I'm a minor enthusiast.

JOHN
Minor?
(pointing)
Three eggs, the jewelry box, plus, I believe, the gold-leaf album. The Czar should have so much Faberge.

JIM
Yes, well, would you care to see something a little more... offbeat?

38 INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT 38

John follows Jim up the spiral staircase. They pass a frail older WOMAN descending.

JIM
Having fun, Mother?

MARGARET WILLIAMS (WOMAN)
Yes, James. Just wonderful.

39 INT. BALLROOM (SECOND FLOOR) - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT 39

John and Jim enter the room, where an untended bar stands at the ready. Jim opens a cabinet and hands over a black case. Inside is an encrusted, jewelry-laden dagger. *

JIM
The dagger that Prince Yussopov used to murder Rasputin. He sliced off his cock and balls with it.
(as John hands it back)
Deliciously evil, don't you think?

Jim places the box back in the cabinet. *

JOHN
Has your family always collected?

JIM
A genteel way of asking if I'm from 'old money.'
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED: 39

JIM (CONT'D)
(before John objects)
I was born in Gordon, Georgia. My father was a barber and my mother a secretary. So, yes, I'm 'nouveau riche.' But it's the 'riche' that counts, now isn't it?

John smiles.

JIM
It's only the trappings of aristocracy that I find worthwhile -- the very things they're forced to sell when the money runs out. And it always does. Then all they're left with is their lovely manners.

VOICE (O.S.)
You goddam bitch!

Jim shudders as a young man storms into the room from the rear. It's the guy who came onto John while washing his Camaro. His name's BILLY HANSON and he's wearing a black T-shirt reading "FUCK YOU."

BILLY (YOUNG MAN)
Won't even let me in my own fuckin' house! Had to come in the servant's entrance!

JIM
(to John)
Excuse me.
(to Billy)
I thought we agreed you'd stay away tonight, Billy?

Billy strides to the bar, grabs a bottle of Wild Turkey and gulps. He spots John, seems to recognize him, then turns to Jim.

BILLY
Gimme 20 dollars.

JIM
What do you need it for?

BILLY
I need it to get fucked up!

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED: (2) 39

JIM
I think you've accomplished that, sport.

BILLY
Not even close.

JIM
I won't give you money. And I'm warning you, Billy. You stay away tonight!

BILLY
Fuck you!

Billy smashes the bottle and waves the broken neck in the air. John, frightened, takes a step back.

BILLY
(to Jim)
You don't give me warnings, I give 'em to you. And you know I back mine up.
(to John)
And, you... you better watch yourself.

Then Billy drops the bottle and struts out whence he came.

John moves to the window and watches... Billy exits through the servant's door, jumps into his CAMARO and SCREECHES off into the night.

Jim closes the shutters and turns to John with a smile, as if nothing happened. DOGS BARK from across the street. *

JIM
I don't know who hates me more, the Atwells or their dogs. Lon's been upset since I had him removed from the museum board. Only one way to remedy this.

Jim pushes a button and the rear third of the ballroom, until now covered with a gold curtain, opens to display a set of organ pipes 30 feet across and 20 feet deep.

Jim removes the dust cover from an organ and sits down to play. With dramatic flourish he bangs on the keys to deafening effect -- Cesar Franck's "Piece Heroique." Jim is seemingly in another world. Dr. Phibes.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED: (3) 39

Two by two, the party guests, as if summoned by the organ, make their way into the room. After a dozen or so have arrived, Jim's trance breaks. He stops on a dime and changes tune. "I Got Rhythm" bellows from the pipes.

Jim looks up and smiles knowingly at John. Then he winks.

DISSOLVE TO:

40 INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT (LATER) 40

The party's over. Jim helps an aging woman usher her HUSBAND out the door.

HUSBAND
Helluva bash, Jim. You've outdone yourself.

JIM
Why thank you, Senator.

He kisses the wife good-bye and closes the door.

41 INT. DRAWING ROOM - SAME TIME 41 *

MAGGIE is already performing clean-up chores. John sits * in a chair, finishing a few notes, and puts the pad away. His eyes go to a bookcase. He walks over and plucks a * book. It's John's book, entitled Before the Fall. *

Jim enters the room, pours two brandies.

JOHN
This is... you have my book. *

JIM
Does that surprise you?

JOHN
It's just that, well, it didn't exactly fly off the shelves.
(beat)
What a coincidence, I mean, that'd I'd be assigned to this story and that you'd have actually read my only book.

Jim sits in his favorite chair. His tabby cat, Sheldon, jumps into his lap. Jim pets him as they talk.

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED: 41

JIM
There are no coincidences.
(off John's look)
Have you ever written for Town and Country before?

JOHN
No.
(beat)
You... requested me?

JIM
They wanted to cover my Christmas party. My acceptance of their offer was contingent on your participation.

John doesn't know what to say. He considers for a moment, then sticks the book back in the shelf.

JOHN
Well, uh, thank you for that.

JIM
Thank you. So, John, sit and have a brandy with me.

JOHN
Actually, I should be going. I have an early flight.

JIM
I'm disappointed.

John offers his hand and Jim just stares at him, somewhat bemused. Finally, Jim shakes John's hand.

JOHN
Thank you. For everything. I'll show myself out.

JIM
Sport?
(off John's look)
I liked your book a great deal.

John, touched, shares a look with Jim before walking away. Before he opens the door, he takes one look back at Jim, watching him leave, petting Sheldon.

42 INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 42

We PAN FROM John's tux, on a chair, PAST the curtains blowing in the breeze TO the clock: 4:30. We hear SIRENS.

John stirs at the sound, sits up and looks out the window.

HIS POV

Several police CRUISERS BLAST down the street, spinning cherry tops washing the night in red.

43 EXT. MERCER HOUSE - NIGHT 43

Every light in the house on. A cadre of police vehicles have replaced the Cadillacs and the horde of folks entering and exiting the door wear not evening apparel, but uniforms. The SQUAWK of WALKIE TALKIES fills the air. *

44 EXT. MONTEREY SQUARE - NIGHT 44

Joe Odom and friends have simply moved their party to the square, complete with punch and cups. *

John, hastily-dressed in jeans and T-shirt, wanders up.

JOHN
What happened?

JOE
Jim Williams went and shot somebody.

John eyes the police tape and the cops controlling the gate. Then he walks away toward the side of the house.

JOE
Hey, where ya goin'?

45 INT. MERCER HOUSE - NIGHT 45

A zoo. Police officers and criminalists move through the hall and the study, collecting evidence. Jim's maid, Maggie, carries a tray of lemonade, offering drinks to thirsty workers.

46 INT. DRAWING ROOM 46

Jim sits, surrounded by cops, as he retells the tale. * DETECTIVE FRANK BOONE, large, menacing, takes notes. *

JIM
He was quite high when he returned. He'd been to the drive-in, some B movie with throats being slashed and that sort of thing. No doubt it had an effect, because I'd never seen him this angry. He destroyed a priceless antique clock.

Maggie hands Detective Boone a glass of lemonade.

JIM
If you care to spice that lemonade, the bar's below the Whistler on the far wall.

BOONE *
I'm on duty, Mr. Williams.

JIM
Suit yourself. Detective, how * long do you think this all will * take?

Two cops share a look. "This guy is unbelievable."

47 EXT. MERCER HOUSE - BACK YARD - NIGHT 47

John enters the back yard through the carriage house gate and seeing no cops, moves toward the rear door of the house. Sheldon, Jim's tabby, stands by the door.

48 INT. MERCER HOUSE - REAR OF HALLWAY - NIGHT 48

John opens the door and slides inside. Sheldon follows him in and disappears down the hallway. A crime photographer with an official badge brushes past. It's Jeff, the guy who photographed the party.

JOHN
Jeff?... What are you doing -- *

JEFF
I work for the city, too. Oh, * hey, I've got the film from the party. I'll get it to you.

(CONTINUED)

48 CONTINUED: 48

John, somewhat in shock, nods and Jeff walks away. John gingerly follows and peers into the drawing room, where sits Jim, talking to Detective Boone. *

JIM
As I said, he fired twice at me. *
I grabbed the Luger from my desk and fired back. If I had not shot Billy I have no doubt it would be my obituary you'd be reading.

Sonny blasts through the door past a cop and sees John.

SONNY
What the hell are you doin' here?!
(spots Jim)
Jesus Christ! My client has nuthin' to say!

Sonny strides into the drawing room.

John starts to leave, then... *

HIS POV - STUDY - BODY

lies on the ground in a pool of red, one outstretched hand cradling a Luger. On an arm a confederate flag tattoo is evident. Billy Hanson.

John stares at the first dead body he's ever seen. He's frozen in place, then his heart starts to race and he moves swiftly for the door.

49 EXT. MERCER HOUSE - DAY (DAWN) 49

First light hits the square and the house. The door's still wide open and cops mill about.

50 INT. DRAWING ROOM - DAY (SAME TIME) 50

Jim, tired, sits in his chair. His cat, Sheldon, sleeps in his lap. He's alone in the room.

51 EXT. MERCER HOUSE - DAY 51

John stands on the sidewalk, outside the police tape, watching. Jeff, the photographer, walks up, reaches in his camera bag and hands over four rolls of film.

(CONTINUED)

51 CONTINUED: 51

JEFF
Sorry, but I'm not gonna have time to process this. *

John nods, then turns as...

The body of Billy Hanson is wheeled out of the house. Sonny exits the front door with Detective Boone, spots John and walks over. *

SONNY
Jim told me you heard Hanson threaten him.
(beat)
No good street hustler. Told Jim he was dangerous.

52 EXT. JONES STREET - DAY 52

As John walks down the street, the morning paper breezes by his shoulder and lands on the sidewalk. The headline: "SHOOTING AT MERCER HOUSE!" News travels fast.

John picks it up, stares at it, then tosses the paper and walks away. The walk turns into a trot, then a run.

53 EXT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - DAY 53

JOHN (V.O.)
To hell with Town and Country!... To hell with Vanity Fair... Well, maybe as an excerpt...

54 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - DAY 54

John paces and talks into the phone...

JOHN
So far it's just a shooting, but there's something here. This place is, well, it's really... odd. Garland, listen to me. You're my agent, you've been loyal, I appreciate that, but an opportunity like this comes along once in a lifetime...

55 INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - BOUHAN, WILLIAMS & LEVY - DAY 55

John sits in an antique chair and listens as Sonny's voice bellows through the conference room doors.

SONNY (O.S.)
Finley Largent's up for re-election so he'll try his damnedest to get this thing to trial. Let's keep our fingers crossed that we're just lookin' at manslaughter.

Sonny exits the room but calls back over his shoulder...

SONNY
He won't take my damn phone calls so we gotta use the back door. Be right back...
(to John)
Thanks for comin' over, coach. Jim's in the office.

56 INT. SONNY'S OFFICE - DAY 56

Jim stands by the window, looking out. He doesn't even turn when Sonny and John enter. Sonny sits on the desk, John in a chair.

SONNY
Jim and I had a talk about something we want to run by ya.

JOHN
You want me to kill the story.

SONNY
Uh... yeah.

JOHN
Done.

SONNY
(surprised)
Okay. great!

Jim turns with a smile.

JIM
Why?

John tries to act nonchalant but Jim holds his stare.

(CONTINUED)

56 CONTINUED: 56

JOHN
Actually, I'm considering writing a book.

SONNY
Sweet Jesus. A book about what? It's self-defense, happens all the time.

JOHN
Then why are you so worried about the D.A.?
(beat)
I overheard...

Sonny regroups.

SONNY
We're a small town. We protect ourselves, our reputations, from the outside world. Word gets out that some New Yorker's tryin' to make us look bad, well, you'll find that Savannahians can get pretty tight-lipped.

JOHN
If there's a trial, will you call me as a witness?

SONNY
What, are you tryin' to threaten me? Perjure yourself and you'll be the one in jail.

JOHN
I wouldn't do that. My point is, I may be from New York, but when it comes to this, I'm at ground zero.
(beat)
Look, if it ends up that there's nothing worth writing about, then what's your worry?

SONNY
That's what I get paid for. I won't permit this.

JOHN
I don't need anyone's 'permission.' Not really.

(CONTINUED)

56 CONTINUED: (2) 56

JIM
Then why are you soliciting it?
(beat)
You need my permission, my acquiescence, my help, or you have no story. Not really.

John's silence says it's true. *

JIM
Would the river flow both ways?

JOHN
I'm not sure I --

JIM
-- Would you share whatever information you garner with me, with Sonny?

John realizes this is a tough one. Finally... *

JOHN
Okay. But it won't change what I write. *

JIM
So... who'd be the main character in this book?

John considers this, not sure if the question is rhetorical. It is. Jim takes a sip of water and smiles. * * *

57 EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - DAY 57

Sonny walks John out the massive front door.

JOHN
If you're worried about the D.A., well, Grand Juries read papers. The proper spin control could make a difference. *

SONNY
What in the hell are you talkin' about? *

*

JOHN
You said Hanson was a street hustler. Did he have a record? Did he take drugs, deal drugs, pimp; who were his friends?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

57 CONTINUED: 57

JOHN (CONT'D)
That's the kind of spin that could pre-influence a Grand Jury. You should get your investigator to hit the street. *

SONNY
Every P.I. in town's an off-duty cop. 'Sides, why do we need a P.I. when we got a hot-shot New York writer to fill in all the gaps? * * *

Sonny retreats, leaving John to consider his dilemma. *

58 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - DAY 58

John walks in carrying a shopping bag, closes the door, dumps the bag, reaches in and pulls out a one-hour photo envelope. He peruses the shots from the party.

INSERT - SHOTS

One of Serena Dawes; one of Jim, his arms draped around a guest, and then the next...

BACK TO SCENE

John flinches a bit as he stares at the next shot. After a few seconds he tacks it on the corkboard above his desk.

CLOSEUP - PHOTO - CRIME SCENE SHOT

of Billy's face, a bit of blood dripping from his lips.

JOHN (V.O.)
Billy Carl Hanson. *

59 INT. SECRETARIAL ROOM - DAY 59

Betty watches as John reads from a sheet.

JOHN
One assault, one possession. It's a start. Thanks, Betty.

John spots Uga, leash in mouth, looking up and panting. *

(CONTINUED)

59 CONTINUED: 59

BETTY
Uga needs to stretch his legs.

JOHN
(under his breath)
No shit.

60 EXT. PULASKI SQUARE - DAY 60

John, with Uga, walks through the square. He spots two kids, a guy and a girl, 19 or so, wearing black T-shirts, dirty jeans, boots, long hair. John walks over.

JOHN
Hey. How ya doin'?
(off their look)
Say, if a guy wanted to find some action, where would he look?
(They shrug; ignore)
Are either of you acquainted with someone named Billy Hanson?

They stand and walk away. John hears laughter coming from... Mandy, sitting on a nearby bench. He walks over.

MANDY
Hey, big boy. What's your pleasure?
(as he sits down)
Word is you intend to write a book.

JOHN
Maybe. Interesting city, interesting characters.

MANDY
You think we're strange.

JOHN
I didn't say that.

MANDY
Didn't have to.
(beat)
If Billy Hanson got shot in the projects instead of a big ol' mansion you wouldn't be here.

JOHN
I'll admit it's an attraction.

(CONTINUED)

60 CONTINUED: 60

MANDY
To what end? *
(off his look) *
Why on earth you doin' this? *

JOHN
I'm a journalist. I intend to tell * a good story and maybe discover the * truth along the way. * *

MANDY
And how do you intend to do that? *

JOHN
Hang around, keep my eyes and ears open, stay objective.

MANDY
Did you check into a hotel?

JOHN
I'm staying on in the carriage house.

MANDY
Jim Williams owns that house, doesn't he?

John ignores the jab.

JOHN
I'm trying to find some information on Billy Hanson.

MANDY
And what would two college kids know about it? They might smoke a joint now and again but they didn't know Billy. See that guy over there?

A hustler, 20's, dirty, with a nervous tic, leans against a tree. All eyes.

JOHN
A bum. What about him?

She stands to walk over. John rises.

MANDY
Stay.
(as John sits back down)
Good dog.

(CONTINUED)

60 CONTINUED: (2) 60

John watches as Mandy strolls over, hands in pockets and talks to the guy. He starts to walk away but she says something that makes him stop. They converse.

John watches as Mandy returns.

MANDY
Hanson used to shack up at a house on Whitaker. The person living there is named Chablis DeVeau. *
*
*

JOHN
How'd you? --

MANDY
-- Told him Billy was holdin' for me and if I found it, I'd cut him in.

John notices that the hustler is walking across the square toward John, smiling lasciviously.

MANDY
Oh, and I told him you and that bulldog were lookin' for some action.

She walks away, laughing. The hustler stops and smiles a dirty grin at John. He's missing his two front teeth.

61 EXT. HOUSE ON WHITAKER STREET - DAY 61

John double-checks a page torn out of a phone book, pockets it, BUZZES, waits a second, RINGS again. The door opens a crack. We only see one eye and a wisp of hair.

CHABLIS
You a flower man?

JOHN
My name's John Kelso. I'm a journalist. I'd like to --

CHABLIS
-- If you ain't got flowers, leave me be. The lady's in mourning and I ain't received rose one to show for it.

She slams the door in his face.

(CONTINUED)

61 CONTINUED: 61

JOHN
Miss DeVeau, I know Billy Hanson lived here. I just want to ask you a few questions. *

The door opens a crack.

CHABLIS
Just knockin' on someone's door?! Where you from, child? Where yer manners? *

And the door slams again.

62 EXT. STREET - '72 OLDS - DAY 62 *

A rusty boat of a car. John sits in the driver's seat, parked, watching the house. After a few seconds, the door opens and CHABLIS exits, wearing a red dress with matching shoes and purse, a red pillbox hat and a black veil of mourning that covers her face. She crosses the street -- long, dark legs striding along as if the pavement were a Paris runway. *

John STARTS the CAR (with some effort) and drives around the park (again with some effort), keeping his eyes on Chablis, who sashays through the park, across Drayton Street and into a small professional building. *

John pulls up, parks his car and reads the sign on the building: "Family Practice -- Dr. Myra Bishop."

DISSOLVE TO:

63 EXT. DR. BISHOP'S OFFICE - DAY (LATER) 63

Chablis, still veiled, exits with a spring in her step and stops when she sees John, leaning on the car, holding a bouquet of roses. Chablis stares, then walks over and accepts flowers in ultra-feminine fashion.

CHABLIS
They're lovely. S'at your car?

John nods. She walks to the passenger side door and stands, waiting for John to open it. It takes a second for him to catch on, then he jumps to open the door.

64 INT. OLDS - DAY 64

As they ride...

(CONTINUED)

64 CONTINUED: 64

CHABLIS
How come a white boy like you is drivin' a old, broken-down jiveass bruthuh's heap like this? If you don't mind me askin'. *

JOHN
It's mine. I bought it. It's actually my first car. *

CHABLIS
And you drive like it is. It's got wheels, honey, it ain't no boat, so try stayin' in jus' one lane. *

JOHN
Right. *
(beat)
It's not a bad car. *

CHABLIS
Oh, did I hurt yer feelin's? I did not mean to do that. I jus' call it out, baby. Whatever way I see it, I jus' call it out. *
(beat)
One thing. Ain't nobody gonna rip it off. *

JOHN
Chablis's an unusual name.

CHABLIS
Got it offa wine bottle. It's a stage name.

JOHN
You're an actress?

CHABLIS
Showgirl at the Pick-Up on Congress. I dance, lip sync, emcee, shit like that. Right now, y'see, I'm just little old Chablis. A simple girl. But when I put on my gowns and my face I turn into 'The Lady Chablis.'

JOHN
A cool white wine for a cool black girl.

64 CONTINUED: (2) 64

CHABLIS
You all flattery, ain't you, honey? Whew! -- My shots are kickin' in! Now, what was it you wanted to talk about?

JOHN
Billy Hanson.

CHABLIS
He's dead. Case closed. *

JOHN
He was your boyfriend?

CHABLIS
No, he was too trashy for me. He went with my roommate Corinne. Lived with us off and on.

JOHN
So he was Corinne's boyfriend?

CHABLIS
Wasn't no 'friend' to it, child. Those two had some wild times.

65 INT. CAR - DAY (LATER) 65

The Olds is parked in front of Chablis' house as Chablis finishes her tale. The mood is more somber. *

CHABLIS
Like many girls, Corinne found herself attracted to the wrong men. * She thought she could change him. * There was no changin' Billy.

JOHN
I'd love to talk to her. *

CHABLIS
You'n me both. She split owing me two months' rent. Billy said he'd * pay up but now he's... *

She wipes a tear. John hands over his pocket kerchief. She takes it, touching his hand a little too long, whimpers thanks and wipes the tears beneath her veil.

(CONTINUED)

65 CONTINUED: 65

CHABLIS
Like my mama always said, 'Two tears in a bucket. Motherfuck it.'

JOHN
I'll have to remember that.

CHABLIS
Oh, no, honey, it's off the record.

JOHN
What's... off the record? *

CHABLIS
Everything. I won't speak ill of the dead.

She nods to the car door. John gets out, walks around and opens it for her. She steps out and walks to her door.

JOHN
The listing in the phone book was F. DeVeau? What's the 'F' for?

She stops, turns and lifts the black veil.

CHABLIS
Frank. That's me. *

And we realize, as does John, that Chablis is a man. *

66 EXT. BOUHAN, WILLIAMS PARKING LOT - DAY 66

Sonny loads his briefcase and work folders into his trunk.

SONNY
She's a he?! Yer shittin' me? *

JOHN
She might prove useful to Jim.

SONNY
Proper folks don't discuss such things.

JOHN
I don't know, she paints a pretty rotten picture of Hanson.

(CONTINUED)

66 CONTINUED: 66

Sonny closes the trunk, gets serious...

SONNY
Lemme tell you a story, coach. There was a judge here years ago. His oldest son was messin' around with a gangster's girl friend. Everybody knew, but nobody talked about it. The boy was warned over and over to stop, but didn't. One morning, they found him lying under the porch with his privates tucked in his lapel. You know, 'dead men tell no tales.' Next day, the local headline read -- 'Fall From Porch Proves Fatal.'

JOHN
Some fall. What's your point?

SONNY
Savin' face in the light of unpleasant circumstances -- it's the Savannah way.
(beat)
I'll see if I can track down the real girl. Corinne, you said?

John nods. Sonny opens his door, slides in.

SONNY
Well, gotta ske-daddle. Doin' Christmas out at Tybee Island. Got all sorts of folks comin'.

John watches him leave, a little like a kid left behind.

67 INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - DAY 67

John sits at his desk, typing on his typewriter and talking on the phone...

JOHN
I thought I might hop a plane and come up for Christmas. It might be fun to...
(hurt)
Oh. No, I understand. Sure... right.
(as DOORBELL RINGS)
Look, you have a merry Christmas, okay? Bye, Dad.

(CONTINUED)

67 CONTINUED: 67

John hangs up and opens the door. A basket of cookies tied with a bow sits on the mat.

MANDY (O.S.)
Don't get too excited. They're store-bought.

Mandy sits in a swing in the yard.

MANDY
You're not going home for the holidays? Don't you wanna see your family?

JOHN
Family? Let's see -- my wife divorced me. My mother died on me and my father's on his third marriage -- to a girl that turned me down to my high school prom.

MANDY
Ouch. Joe and me are goin' out to Tybee. Wanna come? *

JOHN
I don't want to be a third wheel.

MANDY
Me 'n' Joe are just friends.

JOHN
You live together.

MANDY
With about a dozen other people. Kelso, I know you think we're pretty backward, but believe it or not, a woman in the South is not chattel. I mean, I don't have his name tattooed on my butt.

She stands and walks away through the yard.

MANDY
Well, actually, I did once, but it was for a joke and it wasn't permanent or anything.

He smiles and watches her walk away.

(CONTINUED)

67 CONTINUED: (2) 67

BACK INSIDE APARTMENT *

John sits and takes a bite of cookie. He punches his "TRAFFIC NOISE" cassette, grabs a glass snow dome from the table, shakes it, sets it down and goes back to * his typewriter. We PAN FROM the globe TO the shot of * Billy Hanson on the wall. Christmas in Savannah.

68 EXT. ABERCORN STREET - DAY 68

John walks alone. Every passer-by says good morning. John crosses the street to avoid more well-wishers. They greet him anyway. "Merry Christmas!"

69 INT. CLARY'S DRUG - DAY 69

A small-town drugstore with a counter along one wall, where sits John, staring at a clump of yellow on his * plate. The CHRISTMAS PARADE BLARES from a TV on the wall. A waitress for life, RUTH, refills his coffee.

RUTH
They're cheese grits.

She retreats. John hears a BUZZING sound and glances casually down the bar. The glance becomes a stare.

LUTHER DRIGGERS, 45, a scarecrow of a man with a huge Adam's apple and a lank of brown hair hanging over one forehead. He wouldn't be all that unusual except for the two pieces of thread that, defying gravity, rise up, one from each shoulder, and move around him in circles. Horseflies are glued to the thread.

Ruth places a plate in front of Luther. He stares at it while Ruth retreats to a stool in the corner.

John's gaze goes from Luther to Ruth to the cook, to a patron. All of them hold their breath and watch as...

Luther picks up a fork, holds it over the plate, then sets it down, slaps down three dollars and walks out the door.

RUTH
Luther's not eatin'!

Everyone groans. Then, they all return to business as usual. John stares at his plate and slides it away.

70 INT. MERCER HOUSE - DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT 70

Jim sits, drinking a cocktail. John sits across from him, scribbling notes.

JOHN
That's it?

JIM
You were expecting more?

JOHN
Well, it's just that it's damn near word for word what you told the police. I saw the report.

JIM
It's the truth. I thought, as a journalist, that's what you were after.

Jim hands John a Christie's catalog and points to an item.

JIM
What do you think?

JOHN
Nice. A little overpriced, I'd say -- can we get back to --

JIM
-- I went over all this with Sonny.

JOHN
I'd like to hear a different version. I want to hear how your worst enemy would tell the story. *

JIM
Walk next door and ask Lon Atwell.

JOHN
Perhaps you should take this a little more seriously.
(beat)
If this goes to trial, will Sonny represent you?

JIM
Yes.
(beat)
That surprises you?

(CONTINUED)

70 CONTINUED: 70

JOHN
I'm sure he's a fine lawyer, but... does he have much experience in cases like this? *

JIM
It's a moot point. The grand jury will never indict.

JOHN
The D.A. controls grand jury proceedings. *

JIM
So, it's Finley Largent we need to <u>influence</u>?

JOHN
<u>We</u>...?
(as Jim rises)
<u>Influence</u>...?

Jim picks up a carpetbag and beckons to the door.

JIM
I think it's time you met the most important member of my defense team.

71 INT. JIM'S JAGUAR - NIGHT 71

Jim drives and sips from a "traveler" while John eyes the neighborhood. Abject poverty -- frame wooden houses with rats, chickens and one-eyed dogs on the porches.

JOHN
Where are we going?

JIM
Patience.

John spots a sign -- "Bonaventure Cemetery."

JOHN
We're going to the cemetery?

JIM
Not Bonaventure -- the colored cemetery down the road.

72 EXT. COLORED CEMETERY - NIGHT 72

The Jaguar comes to a stop in the spooky darkness. Jim gets out with the carpetbag and John follows cautiously as they cross the dirt road, traverse a culvert and push through dense shrubs and low-hanging branches.

JOHN
Why are -- ?

JIM
Shhh!

When they reach a clearing, John stops...

HIS POV

The colored cemetery. Not as beautiful as Bonaventure -- no marble, no statues; wooden crosses or rocks mark unkempt graves. The oak trees with their fingers of moss sway eerily in the glow of a full moon.

BACK TO SCENE

John catches his breath and follows Jim. They stop. Jim lights a match to a cigarillo then holds it to a small gravestone. It reads: DR. LOUIS BUZZARD -- 1900-1981. *

John's eyes follow Jim's gaze to... A small, hunched figure making her way across the cemetery, through the fog. It's Minerva, the unforgettable woman from the opening. As she nears, she smiles, toothlessly.

MINERVA
Looks like we gots the garden all to ourselves tonight.

JIM
John, meet Minerva.

John eyes the strange woman and slowly offers his hand.

MINERVA
You tryin' to work me?
(off his confusion)
Put that hand back in your pocket!

He does so. She lifts her shades and looks him over top to bottom. Then she sighs and shakes her head.

MINERVA
I feels sorry for you, boy.

(CONTINUED)

72 CONTINUED: 72

JIM
Do tell, Minerva.

MINERVA
He think nobody love him.

JOHN
That's silly. We've never met.

MINERVA
You got a hole in ya -- too many questions. 'Fraid to feel one way, the other till ya gets answers. There ain't no answers. Come a long way to find that out, did'n ya?
(beat)
Now, we gots work to do.

John tries to chuckle, but it's clear he's spooked. Jim plucks a fifty from his wallet.

MINERVA
Put it on the grave. Kiss it first so's it'll come back to you.

Jim kisses the bill and sets it on top of the gravestone. Minerva kneels down and puts her hands in the dirt.

MINERVA
He workin' hard agin' you, James.

JIM
Dr. Buzzard?

MINERVA
No, no. The boy. The dead boy.

JIM
Billy? Well, it doesn't surprise me.

MINERVA
We ain't got much dead time left.

Jim kneels beside her and nods to John to do the same.

JOHN
'Dead time?'

(CONTINUED)

72 CONTINUED: (2) 72

MINERVA
Lasts one hour -- half 'fore midnight to half past. 'Fore's for doin' good, after's for evil. We need a lil' of both tonight. You bring them shiny dimes?

Jim reaches in his carpetbag and pulls out ten new dimes.

MINERVA
Water that ain't been through no pipe?

Jim lifts out a Mason jar of rain water. John can't believe what he's witnessing.

MINERVA
We got to get that boy to ease off. Bury them dimes four inches deep.
(as Jim does so)
Now tell me somethin' about him.

JIM
He tried to kill me.

MINERVA
Somethin' 'afore that. Somethin' nice. Yer kind words will take root and flower; come back to bless ya. *

JIM
His Camaro. He loved his Camaro. He wouldn't let anyone touch it. That car was his pride and joy.

MINERVA
(whispers)
It's workin'. Keep talkin'.

73 FLASHBACK - EXT. MERCER HOUSE - DAY 73

Billy, without a shirt, sits on the curb and delicately paints a design on his black Camaro.

JIM (V.O.)
He spray-painted it flat black. Spent hours fixing it, cleaning it, painting racing stripes and little curlicues on it. He was very creative.

(CONTINUED)

73 CONTINUED: 73

Billy finishes with a flourish and turns, smiling to... Jim, on the porch, cigarillo in hand, nodding approval.

END OF FLASHBACK.

74 BACK TO CEMETERY 74

JIM
That's something most people didn't know about Billy. He was an artist.

MINERVA
As you was sayin' them things he eased up some. He heard ya say ya loved him.

JIM
That's preposterous. He tried to kill me.

MINERVA
He was workin' agin you and now I knows why. He want you to tell the world you hate him. That way, they think you hated him bad enuf to kill him. You do that, you'll go to jail and he know it. Most important thing is to beg that boy's forgiveness each and every day. *

A DISTANT CHURCH BELL RINGS out. Midnight.

MINERVA
Time for doin' evil. What's his name? *

JIM
Finley Largent.

MINERVA
When you go home write his name on a piece of paper seven times. Connect the names as one. Dot no I's, cross no T's. Fold it twice and put it in your pocket. Find a pitcher o' the man -- sew up his mouth with dove's blood and black his eyes. Now go. I gots work to do. *

John and Jim rise to leave. *

(CONTINUED)

74 CONTINUED: 74

MINERVA *
Boy! *
(as John stops; stares) *
Take these words to heart: To *
unnerstan' the livin' you gots to *
commune wif the dead. God! And *
don't dare look back! *

John and Jim walk away. After twenty yards or so, John * can't help himself -- he ventures a peek back...

HIS POV - MINERVA

is splayed face first on the grave, arms outstretched, moaning.

75 INT. JAGUAR - NIGHT 75

As John and Jim drive home...

JIM
The photo-doctoring sounds like good therapy.

JOHN
What about the daily forgiveness?

JIM
Definitely not! Billy was nothing but a would-be murderer!

John stares at Jim. It's the first time he's seen the man's temper. A little scary. Jim settles back into his charm, chuckles and takes a sip from his traveler.

76 EXT. DIXIE'S FLOWER'S/STREET - DAY 76

Mandy helps a lady load a bouquet of flowers into her car. John walking down the street, smiles when he sees her.

JOHN
You work here?

She points toward her apron -- it says "Dixie's Flowers."

MANDY
What you see is what you get.

JOHN
There's nothing wrong with that.

(CONTINUED)

76 CONTINUED: 76

MANDY
Gee, thanks.

She turns and walks back inside.

JOHN
I didn't mean that the way it...

77 INT. DIXIE'S FLOWERS - DAY 77

Mandy helps a customer while DIXIE, 60, stern, looks on. John enters, pretends to shop, then steps into the large glassed-in walk-in refrigerated area.

IN WALK-IN

John fingers flowers. Mandy enters and smirks at John. Dixie enters with a load of flowers, walks to the other end and starts sticking them in vases.

MANDY
So, you wanna send some flowers?

Mandy nods toward Dixie -- the boss is watching, listening.

JOHN
Uh, maybe, but, well, it's kind of complicated.

MANDY
For whom (is it complicated)?
(beat)
What's she like?

JOHN
I don't know her that well, actually.

MANDY
Roses are a favorite. *

JOHN
A bit presumptuous.

MANDY
How about bougainvillea?

JOHN
Perennials might give the wrong impression.

(CONTINUED)

77 CONTINUED: 77

MANDY
Too long term?

JOHN
It's hard to say.

MANDY
This is complicated. What about petunias? They're pretty without being presumptuous, they smell nice, and in three days you throw them out.
(beat)
Sounds like what you're looking for?

John smiles and mulls the offer, as if he's considering.

MANDY
Sorry, we're all out of petunias.

She leaves him standing alone in the room with Dixie, who stares him down. "Well?"

78 EXT. JOHN'S CARRIAGE HOUSE GARAGE - NIGHT (DUSK) 78

John tries, in vain, to start the Olds. *

JOE (O.S.)
Afternoon, Yankee John. Sounds like a dead battery.

Joe Odom, driving a horse-drawn carriage, plops to a stop in the lane. Before John can ask...

JOE
Lady that owns a tour company rear-ended me. Where we headed?

John laughs mischievously and jumps in.

79 INT. PICK-UP LOUNGE - NIGHT 79

Cheap red bulbs draw attention to a proscenium stage where stands a microphone bathed in a white hot spotlight. In the back sit John and Joe. A piped-in OVERTURE begins.

(CONTINUED)

79 CONTINUED: 79

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
(over P.A.)
And now the Pick-Up proudly presents the one, the only, the Empress of Savannah, the Lady Chablis!

The curtain opens and Chablis emerges, dressed in a skimpy, sequined dress with red, yellow and orange flame-like fringes. Huge earrings accent long black curls. She moves to the spotlight and drinks in the applause.

INTERCUT - JOE, JOHN AND CHABLIS

who lip syncs superbly through the first verse of a SEXY SONG. She's a minx, a temptress, smiling as if tasting something delicious. Customers shove dollars into her bosom and garter belt. After the first verse she waves off the music.

CHABLIS
Hey, bitches!

CROWD
Hey, bitch!

CHABLIS
Ooo, child, I am sweatin'. I truly am. And I'm not ashamed of it. I want all you white folks to see how hard I'm workin' for you.

Chablis points to a couple down front.

CHABLIS
You two been neckin' and carryin' on all through my number. No, that's all right, honey. Get it while you can. What's that man of yours do?

WOMAN
He's a doctor.

CHABLIS
A doctor?! Grow your nails, honey, 'cause I might just have to steal him. And I got some fine stuff comin' after my ass. Miss Thing, shine that light over there!

(CONTINUED)

79 CONTINUED: (2) 79

Chablis points to the back. The spotlight hits John full in the face. He's paralyzed -- a deer in the headlights.

CHABLIS
You can't hide from me, honey. Now, this boy, this fine white boy's been chasin' Mama's black ass all over Savannah. Showed up with roses the first day we met. You know why? Cause he knows that nuthin's too good for the Lady; nuthin's too good for the Doll. And don't let me catch none of you bitches layin' a hand on him, 'cause if I do, you will have Chablis to deal with. Me and my ice pick.

The crowd roars approval. John ventures half an embarrassed smile.

CHABLIS
I'll be back, but now, put your hands together for an ice princess, a Nordic swan -- Miss Dawn DuPree!

Chablis disappears. "Like a Virgin" BLASTS from the SPEAKERS and Dawn DuPree, a statuesque blond with legs for days and an Adam's apple for weeks, struts her stuff.

Someone taps John on the shoulder.

GAY STAGE MANAGER
Chablis said to come to her dressing room in ten minutes.

80 INT. DRESSING ROOM HALLWAY - NIGHT 80

John and Joe lean against the wall, waiting.

JOE
I met her before, you know?

JOHN
Chablis?

JOE
Woke up one morning after a shindig. There was a big lump next to me. *
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

80 CONTINUED: 80

JOE (CONT'D)
Only this lump was breathing from both the head and foot of the bed. I yanked back the covers and there, fully-dressed, was Chablis and, uh, the decedent. *

JOHN
Billy Hanson?

JOE
Yup. The boy, well at least the boy with the tattoo -- he split, but Chablis stayed for lunch. And let me tell you somethin' -- that he/she cooks up a mean gumbo.

CHABLIS (O.S.)
Entre!

John and Joe part the curtains and enter.

CHABLIS
Hello, John. Who's your cute friend?

JOE
Joe Odom. We've met before -- slept together one night.

CHABLIS
You'll have to narrow it down a bit more than that, child.

JOE
Another tale for another time. I'll leave you two alone. *

Joe leaves. John gives Chablis his best, concerned look.

JOHN
So, how are you doing?

CHABLIS
Still hidin' my candy. Oh, I got a new man -- tall, blond boy -- * mechanic over on Abercorn. But if * you meet him, you can't say nuthin' about my T, okay?

JOHN
Your T?

(CONTINUED)

80 CONTINUED: (2) 80

CHABLIS
My thang, my business, what's goin' on in my life; what's going on... down there.
(beat)
You still want to interview the Doll, don't you, child? *

JOHN
Yes. Very much so.

CHABLIS
Tell you what. I'll sleep on it.
(sexily)
Wanna help?

81 INT. CARRIAGE (MARKET STREET) - NIGHT 81

Joe and John ride the carriage through the night. *

JOE
Lord, you Yankees are something else. I do my best to set you on the straight and narrow and look what happens. You buy an automobile that ain't fit to take a hog to market in, and now you're hangin' out with a voodoo priestess and a drag queen. Your Mama and Daddy gonna pitch a fit when they hear about this, and I reckon they're gonna blame it all on me. *

JOHN
You're the one who slept with her.

Joe stops the carriage in front of a warehouse.

JOE
Got something I wanna show you.

82 INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT 82

Joe flips a light switch. The warehouse is a large rectangular room, empty, dusty, with a stage at one end.

JOE
'Sweet Georgia Brown's.' Signed the lease Monday.

(CONTINUED)

82 CONTINUED: 82

JOHN
Wow. Great space.

JOE
I'm doin' the handiwork but Mandy's overseein' the finer touches.

JOHN
How's she doing?
(beat)
Mandy...?

JOE
Fine. You like her, huh?
(off John's look)
It's okay. She's a likeable gal. One thing you should consider...

Joe, serious, drapes an arm around John's shoulder.

JOE
I care for her a great deal. You know that, don't you?

JOHN
Look, Joe, you don't have to worry --

JOE
-- Me worry? Nah. Know why?
(off John's look)
'Cause there's nuthin' there to worry about. She looks at you in a way she never looks at me.
(beat)
Walk softly. A girl like that could change your life.

Joe turns out the light.

83 EXT. CHATHAM COUNTRY COURTHOUSE - ESTABLISHING - DAY 83

84 INT. COURTHOUSE - POV - DAY 84

THROUGH a door opened a crack. A BAILIFF calls...

BAILIFF
Hear yea. Hear yea. Grand Jury, County of Chatham, State of Georgia, is now in session.

(CONTINUED)

84 CONTINUED: 84

REVERSE SHOT

two eyes, hidden behind purple wire-rimmed glasses peer through the crack. A guard pulls it shut.

85 INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY 85

John, on a bench, watches as Minerva sits down next to him. She opens her bag and pulls out vials, twigs, bones and odd bits of cloth.

Sonny sits on another nearby bench, reading the Sports.

86 INT. COURTHOUSE PRESS ROOM - DAY 86

Three reporters stand in the corner, chewing the fat.

John sits at a table, typing on his portable typewriter. * He looks up to see Sonny walking briskly down the hallway, * a man on a mission.

87 EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY 87

John catches up to Sonny...

JOHN *
What happened?! *

SONNY
Grand Jury indicted Murder One.
(beat)
They're tryin' to put him away for *
life. *

88 EXT. MERCER HOUSE - DAY 88

A crowd of REPORTERS, including John, stand in the yard as Boone leads a handcuffed Jim Williams through the * crowd to a police cruiser. Jim walks with the air of a man to whom the commotion is simply an annoyance.

NANCY AMMONS (REPORTER)
Anything to say, Mr. Williams?

JIM
Only what everyone in town already knows. I'm innocent.

As he's placed in the car...

(CONTINUED)

88 CONTINUED: 88

REPORTER #2
Then why were you arrested?

JIM
Mere formality. I'll be back in Mercer House in time for afternoon cocktails.

The door shuts and the cruiser drives away.

John notices... Lon Atwell, across the street -- he raises a staked sign and plants it firmly in his front yard. The sign, complete with photo, reads: Re-elect Finley Largent -- D.A. The photo becomes...

89 INT. COURTROOM - DAY 89

The real man -- FINLEY LARGENT, 45, slightly gray, cherubic, stands, addressing JUDGE SAMUEL WHITE -- 50s, stately, silver. Sonny and HENRY SKERRIDGE, 50, Sonny's second chair, stand at the defense table.

LARGENT
With all due respect, the prosecution feels that Mr. Williams' wealth makes him a flight risk. *

SONNY
Mr. Williams <u>is</u> wealthy, Judge. He made his money collectin' and restorin' antiques and homes. But it's more than an occupation; it's his passion. He has a house full of treasures without which his life would be incomplete. Would you ever leave Mercer House, Jim?

JIM
I'll die in Mercer House.

LARGENT
Your Honor, the community that put both of us in the positions we hold would be less than pleased with an order allowing the bail for a wealthy defendant in a first degree murder case. And they'd be right. *

Judge White considers this, then... *

(CONTINUED)

89 CONTINUED: 89

JUDGE
Due to the violent nature of the crime with which Mr. Williams is accused, I hereby order that defendant be held without bail until time of trial.

Jim allows the guards to handcuff him. He winks at John.

JIM
Well, sport, it looks like there might be a book in this after all.

Jim is led away. John and Sonny...

JOHN
Does he have <u>any</u> idea how serious this is?

SONNY
You know it, I know it, and come tonight, so will he.

John spots something on the table... A photo of Largent -- His lips "sewn shut" with red ink. Dove's blood.

90 INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT 90

Called the pod. It holds defendants awaiting trial. We MOVE PAST the faces -- one a young hood in too deep, the next a stone cold killer, one loon, old and crazy (howling), the next lean and mean. Finally, in the corner nearest the bars is Jim, refusing to believe his predicament. He lights a cigarillo, takes a drag, rests his head against the wall, closes his eyes and lets the smoke filter out of his mouth up to the ceiling. *

91 INT. POD - DAY (DAWN) 91

Inmates asleep. The overhead fluorescent light comes on. Jim -- same exact position, is wide awake.

92 INT. JAIL VISITING ROOM - DAY 92

John and Jim sit in the small, private room. A cassette recorder sits on the table. *

JOHN
Have any of your friends visited you?

(CONTINUED)

92 CONTINUED: 92

JIM
Absolutely not. I won't be seen like this. I need a private cell, a desk, a phone...

JOHN
How do you get along with your cell mates?

JIM
Killers and lunatics. Earplugs! I'll need earplugs, and cigarettes for bribes. Bring them tomorrow.

John stares hard at Jim, something on his mind.

JIM
What is it, sport?

JOHN
You told Sonny that I heard Billy threaten you the night you shot him.

JIM
Yes?

JOHN
You threatened him, too, Jim. If I'm called to testify...

JIM
Billy, who had a history of violence, was drunk, high. While trespassing, he profanely demanded money and brandished a broken bottle. Is that your recollection as well?

JOHN
More or less.

JIM
Then your testimony could only help me.

John thinks this over, then decides to dive in...

JOHN
What was it... between the two of you? *

(CONTINUED)

92 CONTINUED: (2) 92

John senses Jim's reluctance and shuts off the recorder. Jim stares at John, sizing him up, then leans forward, as if what he has to say is between the two of them...

JIM
We had a bond, he and I -- that's something they'll never understand. Billy was going to make something of himself. Great things, great people, can come from humble beginnings. He needed what I gave him. And I needed what he gave me. Now, do you wish to pass judgment? *

JOHN
No.

JIM
Two months before the shooting, Billy overdosed on pills. I found him in the house, rushed him to the hospital and waited there for hours, praying that he'd make it. If I wanted to kill Billy, wouldn't I have just let him die then?

John holds Jim's look.

JIM
I'm innocent, John. It's important to me that you believe that. Do you believe that?

JOHN
Yes.

Jim sighs and smiles.

JOHN
I'm having trouble getting anyone to talk to me.

JIM
I'll make some arrangements.

John rises to leave.

JIM
Oh, when you come tomorrow, bring in the Christies' and Sotheby's catalogs.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

92 CONTINUED: (3) 92

JIM (CONT'D)
And they serve dinner at seven; so that's when we'll make our calls.

JOHN
Calls?

93 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - NIGHT 93

John, at his desk, on the phone...

JOHN
Accept the charges, operator.

94 INT. CELL BLOCK - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT 94

Jim, on the phone, pulls out an earplug.

JIM
Evening, sport. Let's give this a try, shall we?

One inmate, Killer, walks over and stands very near Jim. Jim pulls out a cigarette, hands it to him and lights it with a gold inlaid lighter.

95 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT 95

John dials a number. After a few seconds...

JOHN
Hello. Jim Williams calling for Geza von Habsburg.

96 INT. CHRISTIE'S (LONDON) - CONTINUOUS ACTION - DAY 96

GEZA VON HABSBURG, an elegant gent, walks through a room full of items set for auction and accepts the phone.

GEZA
James, how nice to hear from you.

97 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT 97

John eavesdrops and types on his typewriter. *

98 INT. POD - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT 98

Jim doles out another cigarette as he speaks to Geza...

JIM
Geza, would you be interested in my Maximilian desk?

The Loon crawls to all fours in the middle of the cell, raises his head and howls like a wolf. Jim covers the receiver, tosses the whole pack of cigs to Killer.

JIM
Would you please shut him up?!

99 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT 99

John grimaces. The BARKING comes through loud and clear.

100 INT. CHRISTIE'S - CONTINUOUS ACTION - DAY 100

Geza hears the BARKING too.

GEZA
Your dog doesn't want you to sell. What breed?

101 INT. POD - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT 101

JIM
Russian wolfhound.

Killer takes a cig from the pack and leans in for a light. Jim pulls out the gold lighter but Killer clasps his hand over Jim's as he flicks it. He wants the lighter. The Loon starts to yip and squirm like a small dog.

GEZA (V.O.)
What's that one, a sharpei?

JIM
No, that's my Yorkie.
(cups phone)
Would someone <u>please</u> put the dogs in the garden.

Jim gives in and hands over the lighter. Killer pockets it, kicks the Loon, and shoves a sock in his mouth.

JIM
Now, Geza, you know I'll want top dollar.

102 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT 102

John stifles a laugh and keeps typing.

103 EXT. BEAUTIFUL HOME - DAY 103

A dozen or so WOMEN, wearing white gloves, long dresses and huge hats, stand, assembled at the front door.

John eyes the address and walks up the porch to the women.

JOHN
Excuse me. Is this where the Married Women's Card Club is meeting today?

WOMAN
Yes.

JOHN
(eyeing the crowd)
Should we... ring the doorbell.

ANOTHER WOMAN
Oh, heavens no!

MRS. HAMILTON
We have very strict rules. The door opens precisely at four...

And, right on time, it does. CYNTHIA VAUGHN, 40s, an ultra-thin Southern socialite, smiles broadly.

104 INT. HOME - DAY 104

Cynthia Vaughn ushers John through the living room, where women sit at card tables, playing hands of bridge.

MRS. VAUGHN
Four-fifteen, water is served; four-thirty, water is removed; four-forty, ashtrays emptied.

They enter the adjoining room, the parlor, where three more card tables are set up and filled with players.

MRS. VAUGHN
At four fifty-five napkins are passed.

(CONTINUED)

104 CONTINUED: 104

They arrive in a dining room with a huge table covered with silver and vantage of both rooms full of card-players. Mrs. Vaughn checks her watch and allows herself a blue cigarette lifted from a gilded case.

Three black maids, in crisp black and white uniforms, stand against one wall, at the ready, each holding a tray with pre-poured cocktails.

JOHN
You don't play?

MRS. VAUGHN
Oo, no. I have to keep things on schedule.
(checks watch)
It's five-fifteen. Third cocktail!

The black maids, way ahead of the game, move quickly to the tables, issuing more beverages.

JOHN
Military precision. Thank you for inviting me.

MRS. VAUGHN
Actually, Jim asked me to introduce you around. But if we could keep that between us?...

JOHN
Why?

MRS. VAUGHN
Jim has been a true friend to me over the years but most of these ladies are still trying to decide how they'll respond to his current ... predicament. *
(off John's look)
You know, the 'incident.'
(beat)
I've work to do in the kitchen but if you'd like to sit in...

JOHN
I don't play bridge.

MRS. VAUGHN
Oh, no, I didn't mean 'play.' Men aren't allowed, especially not single men.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

104 CONTINUED: (2) 104

MRS. VAUGHN
You can, however, take a cocktail and sit at the whist table in the corner if you'd like.

AT WHIST TABLE

John sits quietly at the round table and listens as the women continue to play and converse.

WOMAN #1
It was a crime passionnel, a lover's quarrel. It isn't the same as murder. What's the trump?

WOMAN #2
Pip clubs. That may be, but I gather it's going to be rather sticky for Jim.

John feigns disinterest, but hangs on every word.

WOMAN #3
Really?...

MRS. VAUGHN (O.S.)
Five thirty-five: last hand, pass linen.

WOMAN #2
There was no gunpowder on that boy's hands. That means he couldn't have fired the gun, as Jim claims.

WOMAN #3
Good Lord!

WOMAN #2
And the location of the bullet wounds --

105 EXT. LAFAYETTE SQUARE - DAY 105

John and a GENTLEMAN walking two King Charles spaniels...

GENTLEMAN
-- seems to be at odds with Mr. Williams' scenario of self-defense.

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED: 105

JOHN
How so?

GENTLEMAN
One entered the chest, the second bullet hit the boy in the back. And the third, well, the third bullet --

106 INT. SERENA DAWES' BEDROOM - DAY 106

Like the madam's bedroom in a plush Victorian bordello. In an ornate, four-poster bed covered in silken pillows, sits Serena, propped up, in a robe, her hair and makeup done up to receive guests.

SERENA
-- hit Billy squarely behind the ear.

John, sitting in a chair, sips a mint julep.

SERENA
So, the way it looks, Jim shot him once in the chest and then stepped around the desk and shot him twice more as he lay on the floor.

JOHN
A coup de grace?

SERENA
Precisely.

JOHN
So, what do you think will happen to Jim?

SERENA
It's difficult to say. Those who are happy that Billy will no longer be burning rubber through the squares, are the exact people who think that Jim picked a most unseemly way to exit the closet, if you will.

JOHN
With a bang.

SERENA
Literally. And then there are the others.

(CONTINUED)

106 CONTINUED: 106

JOHN
The others?

SERENA
There's bound to be a certain resentment about Jim's having killed that boy -- that boy in particular, I mean. Billy was a very accomplished hustler, from all accounts very good at his trade, and very much appreciated by both men and women. The trouble is he hadn't finished making the rounds. Billy Hanson was known to be a good time... but a good time not yet had by all.

A MAID knocks and enters the room.

MAID
Miss Dawes, Mr. Lester Reinhart is downstairs. *

SERENA
Pour a stiff drink and show him up.
(John stands to leave)
Come by anytime. But call first. *

106A INT. JOE ODOMS - DAY 106A *

John is getting a haircut from Jerry. Joe looks on... *

JOE *
You know what they're saying *
around town, don't you? *
(off John's look) *
They're saying Jim Williams shot the best piece of ass in Savannah.

107 INT. SONNY SEILER'S OFFICE - DAY 107

John and Sonny...

SONNY
Good gossip is hard currency in this town. Folks are just paying bills. When the chips are down, they'll be there for Jim. It's all gonna work out fine, coach. Trust me.

(CONTINUED)

107 CONTINUED: 107

JOHN
I'd rather hear your legal strategies.

SONNY
Our game plan is still percolatin'.

JOHN
I've shared every bit of information I've come across. I thought we had a deal? *

Sonny considers this and nods for John to follow him, out of the office, through the lobby and into...

108 INT. LAW OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY 108

The war room. Henry Skerridge and three associates are at work. Paperwork is splayed on the table and one entire wall is a white marking board filled with information.

SONNY
(as they enter)
Don't mind us.

Sonny grabs a pointer and gestures to a seat, which John, amused, takes. Sonny points to a date -- "Aug. 26" -- on the board.

SONNY
Trial date. Big game in three weeks. This is a shootout and both sides got one silver bullet. Theirs is gunshot residue.

Sonny, with the pointer, raps the words "GUNSHOT RESIDUE" on the board.

SONNY
No gunshot residue on Billy's hands means he didn't fire, means Jim shot him in cold blood and mocked-up the scene. *

JOHN
How do you plan to counter that?

(CONTINUED)

108 CONTINUED: 108

SONNY
Gunshot residue tests are unreliable. Hell, they're not even admissible in some jurisdictions. Finley has Doc Poe but we'll counter with cuttin' edge science. We've got an expert from up north. *

JOHN
What about the scene being contrived?

SONNY
Shoddy police work. That's <u>our</u> bullet.

Sonny rumages through some bloody 8x10's on the table. John turns his head, not caring to gaze at the scene. Sonny finds the one he's looking for and hands it over. *

ANGLE ON PHOTO

a crime scene shot -- the study. Crowded with cops, criminalists and, in the b.g., John, standing in the door, staring at the dead body.

BACK TO SCENE

JOHN
That's, that's <u>me</u>?!

SONNY
Just like you said -- ground zero. Cops shoulda never let you in.

JOHN
Actually, I, uh, kind of let myself in... through the back gate.

SONNY
They shoulda been there to stop ya. Now for the big No-No. Look at the rug. See Jim's cat?

ANGLE ON PHOTO

blended in with the Persian rug we can see Sheldon, Jim's tabby.

(CONTINUED)

108 CONTINUED: (2) 108

BACK TO SCENE

SONNY
Five cops, two criminalists, a Yankee reporter and a pussy cat. Eight people and a feline moving through the room, rearranging furniture and stepping all over the evidence.

John's on the spot. After all, he let the cat in.

SONNY
So, that's about it. How we doin', coach?

JOHN
Isn't there another issue?
(off their looks)
Jim's relationship with Billy?

Now he has their attention.

HENRY
And how would you suggest we handle that?

JOHN
Own up to the facts at hand. They had a relationship. Big deal. Billy was volatile and strung out. He used Jim for money.

SONNY
Finley wouldn't dare raise it and if he tried, the judge wouldn't let it in.

John, not quite convinced, stares at Sonny.

JOHN
Are you bringing anyone on to help with the trial?

Every lawyer looks up, a tad offended.

SONNY
Like who?

JOHN
I don't know, a defense specialist, a voir dire expert?

(CONTINUED)

108 CONTINUED: (3) 108

SONNY
Betty usually helps me pick a jury.

JOHN
Betty -- your secretary -- Betty?

HENRY
Best judge o' character I ever met.

109 EXT. BULL STREET - NIGHT 109

John walks down the street, alone with his thoughts. We hear MUSIC from a bar across the street... and then a beautiful voice SINGING. John stops, drawn by the SONG.

110 INT. CHURCHILL'S BAR - NIGHT (SAME TIME) 110 *

Packed. John steps inside, his eyes fixed on...

Mandy -- onstage, belting out a slow-groove, dirty blues number. She's good. When she spots John she smiles.

John smiles back and claps and whistles along with the crowd as she finishes with a flourish.

Mandy nods thanks and steps off the stage as the band moves into their next number. She accepts compliments as she moves through the crowd and over to John.

JOHN
You're good. I didn't even know you sang. *

MANDY
You never asked.

JOHN
Fairly dirty blues for a white girl. Do you have another set?

MANDY
Nope. Why? *

JOHN *
You wanna get a cup of coffee? *
*

MANDY
Business or pleasure? *

His look tells her it's "business." *

111 INT. CLARY'S - NIGHT 111

John and Mandy sit at the counter, drinking coffee.

MANDY
Normally, there wouldn't be a problem, seein' as the general rule is 'rich people get off.' The problem is they've always been straight.

JOHN
So I'm not crazy?

MANDY
Neither is Sonny. Jim's friends knew he was gay. Secretly, they congratulated themselves on being so cosmopolitan but, if Jim had been completely open with his sexuality, they'd have shunned him. Maybe the jury will, too.
(as John sighs, nods)
You know, of course, that nobody's ever gonna know what really happened that night.

JOHN
Jim's told his story a hundred times without wavering one iota.

MANDY
You're quite the advocate. What happened to 'Hang around, keep my eyes and ears open and stay objective?'

JOHN
What if there's more at stake here than journalistic ethics? What if a man's denied a fair trial based on his sexuality?

MANDY
Something that would never happen in New York, right?

JOHN
You said it, not me.

112 EXT. STREET - NIGHT 112

John and Mandy walk into a square with see-saws and jungle-gyms. *
*

(CONTINUED)

112 CONTINUED: 112

JOHN
You know, you don't seem like you're from here. *

MANDY
Born here, didn't like it, moved away, figured out that the part I didn't like was me, worked on that and moved back. *
(points to swing set)
Got my first kiss right here. Sammy Jenks. Gave him a black eye.

She sits in one of the swings. John leans against the set.

JOHN
That's what love'll do to you.

MANDY
You know, Kelso, I'm havin' trouble picturing what kind of woman you'd take the trouble to marry.

JOHN
First love deal. We got married a week after graduation from college. *

MANDY
So what happened?

JOHN
I don't know. Most of the time I was working on the book. Maybe she thought I'd be famous. After it was published, she'd wake up at the crack of dawn, make coffee, cross her fingers and open the Sunday Times, sure that she'd see it listed as a best-seller. Then one Sunday she didn't wake up early, didn't make coffee, didn't cross her fingers, and... I knew.

MANDY
She left you because your book wasn't a hit? I don't know, Kelso, that seems pretty shallow to me.

(CONTINUED)

112 CONTINUED: (2) 112

JOHN
Who can judge what goes on between two people?
(beat)
You pick up... you move on.

MANDY
Have ya?

JOHN
Now that I think about it, I suppose I hadn't. Then I saw that body on the floor, saw the blood, stared at the face.
(beat)
And I'm not even from Transylvania.

He starts to swing. She joins in...

MANDY
So what happens next? Or does someone have to die for you to know.

JOHN
I cover the trial, put my notes together, go back to New York and write my book.

MANDY
You can't write in Savannah?

JOHN
New York's home.

MANDY
You haven't been back once. I happen to think we're growin' on you.

Now they're both swinging, higher and higher, touching the limbs of an old oak.

113 EXT. JOE ODOM'S HOUSE - NIGHT 113

John walks Mandy to the door. The house is dark.

JOHN
Quiet. Too quiet.

MANDY
Joe's out of town on a buying trip.

(CONTINUED)

113 CONTINUED: 113

JOHN
Um, I should probably go.

They stare at one another. Then John turns to leave.

MANDY
In case you're wondering, that was
the perfect time for a kiss.

JOHN
Sammy Jenks warned me about you.

MANDY
Kelso...?

JOHN
Yeah?

MANDY
Who are you saving it for?

OFF his confused look -- she touches her heart.

114 INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY 114

A sign reads: "QUIET! VOIR DIRE IN PROGRESS."

115 INT. COURTROOM - MONTAGE - DAY 115

A) Voire dire. Judge White on the bench. John sits in the back of the room. Largent and two assistant D.A.'s sit at one table and Henry and Betty sit at the other. Sonny's at the podium, questioning the JURY PANEL, about fifty people, some we've seen in other scenes.

SONNY
How many of you folks haven't
heard anything about this case?

One hand goes up -- Juror #13, LUTHER DRIGGERS, off to one side, his horseflies doing loop-de-loops above him.

CUT TO: *

B) More voire dire: There are a few less panelists. Largent questions...

JUROR #1
(kind, elderly woman)
He has grand parties, I know that.

(CONTINUED)

115 CONTINUED: 115

LARGENT
Have you ever attended one?

JUROR #1
Oh, heavens, no.

CUT TO: *

C) More voire dire: About thirty panelists left.

JUROR #20
(bushy-haired black man)
Hustlers done took over the squares -- peddlin' dope and whatnot. Decent folks can't go out after dark.

CUT TO: *

D) JUROR #5

JUROR #5
(woman)
From what I hear, he never worked a day in his life. Least not real work. He drives a Jag-wire.

CUT TO: *

E) SONNY

at bench, sotto, to Judge White.

SONNY
We'll use a strike, Y'Honor.

CUT TO: *

F) JUROR #48

JUROR #48
(man)
I have 37 years in the pulpit, 14 years with the Southern Baptist Leadership Committee, nine years --

SONNY
-- Uh, thank you, sir.

(CONTINUED)

115 CONTINUED: (2) 115

Sonny turns to Betty and winks. Betty makes a facial expression to Judge White and he strikes #48 from his list.

CUT TO:

G) Voire dire: About twenty panelists left. Sonny questions...

JUROR #39
(effeminate man, 50's)
I play the harp -- parties and Sunday brunch at the Hyatt.

SONNY
Do you have a family, sir?

MAN
Oh, no, I'm a bachelor.

CUT TO:

H) FINLEY LARGENT

at the bench, whispers...

LARGENT
Strike, Your Honor.

CUT TO:

I) ALL LAWYERS

Prosecution and defense, are huddled together at the judge's bench. After a few seconds they all turn, and with glowing smiles, face...

The twelve jurors left. Six black, six white. We PAN DOWN the row -- Luther Driggers (#13), the kind old woman (Juror #1) and the bushy-haired black man (#20) are among them.

JUDGE
Ladies and gentlemen, you constitute our jury for this trial, this trial is expected to last several days. I am going to let you go home for the evening -- instruct you to be back in the morning at 9:30 and report to your jury room. In the meantime, don't talk to anybody about this case.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

115 CONTINUED: (3) 115

JUDGE (CONT'D)
Don't let anyone talk to you about this case. Don't read any newspaper accounts. Don't watch it on television. If anybody tries to approach you about this case, I want you to report it to me the first thing in the morning. You are excused for the evening.

The jury rises and starts to exit.

JUDGE
Mr. Driggers, let me speak to you.

Mr. Driggers walks over to in front of the Judge.

JUDGE
Luther, listen, this is a courtroom. Don't bring those flies back in here tomorrow and leave that vial of water or whatever that stuff is at home tomorrow.

LUTHER
Samuel, you know when we were in Georgia. I know how you hated my bugs and you know how I loved them!

JUDGE
We are no longer at the University. This is a courtroom. Now I am telling you to leave all that foolishness at home tomorrow -- do you understand?

LUTHER
I do take umbrage -- but I'll do it.

Luther leaves. The Judge peruses papers.

116 EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY 116

Sonny, John, Betty and Henry walk back to the office.

JOHN
What's the story on the guy with the horsefly epaulets?

BETTY
Luther Diggers. He's a genius.

(CONTINUED)

116 CONTINUED: 116

HENRY
Developed the No-Pest strip. The company he worked for took the credit and the money, so now he just wanders around town with a bottle of poison in his pocket. *

JOHN
What?

HENRY
Says some day he's gonna put it in the water supply and do us all in.

JOHN
So why do you want him on a jury?

SONNY
We're the defense, coach. We want all the nuts we can get.

JOHN
What about Largent?

SONNY
Finley's up for reelection. If he strikes Luther, it might just upset him enough to... ya know?

Sonny walks in another direction...

SONNY
Well, I'll be back in on Sunday.

JOHN
You've got a murder trial starting in three days! Where are you going?

SONNY
Home opener against 'Bama. *

117 EXT. STREET - DAY (SUNDAY) 117

John plops quarters in a machine and extracts a New York Times. He notices, in the adjacent machine, the Savannah Sentinel front page story -- "NO JOY: ALABAMA DOWNS GEORGIA." *

118 INT. SONNY'S OFFICE - NIGHT (SUNDAY) 118

Sonny sits at his desk, shades drawn. Uga, paws covering his face, lies on the floor. John knocks and enters.

JIM
I just wanted to, uh, come by and wish you luck.

Sonny, without looking up, nods his head.

119 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT 119

Henry, Betty and a couple of clerks assemble the trial paraphernalia. John walks in, obviously perturbed.

JOHN
How long will this last?

BETTY
Until the Dawgs win.

JOHN
Jesus, who does Georgia play next week?

HENRY
Notre Dame.

Even John knows this is bad.

120 INT. POD - NIGHT 120

Killer has one foot on the Loon's chest. Two black guys are engaged in a heated argument over a game of checkers. The TV BLARES and the RADIO CRANKS "GANGSTA RAP."

Jim sits on his bench, trying in vain to write a letter. Finally, he stands.

JIM
<u>THIS</u>... is entirely unacceptable!

Strangely, all activity stops. They turn to him.

JIM
Turn that and that... off!

One of the black inmates KILLS the RADIO, the other turns DOWN the VOLUME on the TV.

(CONTINUED)

120 CONTINUED: 120

JIM
Thank you. As I'm now entering the trial phase of my incarceration, I'll require peace and quiet for concentration. I believe it's time we set some ground rules, gentlemen, and I use the word loosely.

KILLER
Who made you King Shit?

JIM
This is not a banana republic. This cell, our little community, is a democracy -- a capitalist democracy. I provide goods -- cigarettes, candies, stale rolls -- and I expect something in return or I'll be forced to re-examine benefit versus bottom line. In short, I'll cut you off.

The inmates all stare. He seems to have their attention.

JIM
When I make my calls, I expect quiet. 23-hours-a-day you control programming. I demand one hour -- the news hour. Also, I'm growing tired of whatever it is that constantly clangs from the radio. *

KILLER
I don't like that shit, either.

BLACK GUY
Fuck you.

JIM
And I prefer classical. This, gentlemen, is called a dialogue. Dialogue leads to concurrence, peace and... civility.

His piece said, Jim sits down and lights a cigarillo.

121 EXT. MERCER HOUSE - DAY 121

John RINGS the BUZZER. MARGARET WILLIAMS opens the door.

122 INT. JIM'S BEDROOM - DAY 122

Four poster Colonial bed accented by a full-size oil portrait of a pensive Jim as a young man.

John gives the room a once-over while Margaret opens an enormous closet, revealing Jim's wardrobe. John takes a deep breath and starts to pick through the clothes.

123 INT. JAIL - VISITOR ROOM - DAY 123

John looks out the window, troubled, while Jim dresses -- tying his tie.

JOHN
Jim... I'm not sure how you're going to take this...

JIM
What?

JOHN
You've got a lot riding. Are you sure Sonny's up to this?

JIM
Thank you for your concern, sport, but I'm sure he'll do fine. Now concentrate and give me your opinion.

John lifts a Polaroid in his hand and stares at it.

JOHN
Interesting. Almost pre-Bauhaus.

JIM
But is it worth the trade for the Regency?

JOHN
I'm partial to simplicity.

JIM
See if Geza will go for it.
(dons blazer)
Well?

JOHN
Clean lines. Conservative. Humble.

JIM
This blazer's Dunhill linen and the buttons are 18-carat Georgia gold.

124 INT. COURTROOM - DAY 124

Full to the rafters. Henry and an associate sit at the defense table with Jim. John, in the first spectator row, looks around nervously for Sonny, then leans forward and taps Henry on the shoulder.

JOHN
Where is he?

HENRY
He was still in his office when I left -- grumbling about our 'problems on defense.'

JOHN
Let's hope he was talking about the game.

John notices a WOMAN on the first row behind the prosecution. She's 38 and prematurely gray. Her look says that her life's been both parts short and excruciatingly long. She catches John's stare. *

JIM
Billy's mother.

Sonny comes through the door, down the aisle and takes a seat at the defense table. He looks like he's had a sleepless night -- baggy eyes, hair tousled, a preoccupied look on his face. * * *

Finley, Largent and his ASSISTANT D.A. take note and smile.

(NOTE: During trial scenes, John is constantly making notes. Jim is attentive, but writing letters or doodling. We also check in with jurors and spectators such as Minerva, Margaret Williams and Mrs. Hanson.)

BAILIFF
Order in the court. Extinguish all cigarettes. State of Georgia versus James Williams. Honorable Samuel White, presiding.

Judge White enters, sits and nods to the Bailiff. A door opens and the jurors enter -- including Luther, sans horseflies. They sit, the Judge nods and everyone else does, too. White looks to Largent and nods again.

LARGENT
Prosecution's ready, Your Honor.

Henry nudges Sonny.

(CONTINUED)

124 CONTINUED: 124

SONNY
Defense ready, Y'Honor.

JUDGE
Care to open, Mr. Largent?

Finley Largent stands. A white powder cloud rises with him from a spot of talc on his backside. Lawyer pigpen.

A few chuckles. John looks at Minerva, on the back row -- a sly grin on her face. Jim whispers back to John... *

JIM
High John the Conqueror -- a powerful root.

LARGENT
The philosopher Thomas Hobbes is quoted as saying that life is nasty, brutish and short, and surely it must have seemed so to Billy Hanson as he lay wounded, his blood and his life oozing out onto Jim Williams' Persian rug.

DISSOLVE TO:

125 INT. COURTROOM - DAY (LATER) 125

CLOCK

on the wall reads 4:05.

ANGLE ON SONNY

Looking more tired than before, glares into space. The * jury, also a little worn out, is still listening to... *

LARGENT
I believe when faced with the evidence, you'll render the verdict that's fair and just. Guilty of first degree murder. Thank you.

JUDGE
Mr. Seiler, seein' we have less than an hour, would you prefer to wait until tomorrow to open?

(CONTINUED)

125 CONTINUED: 125

JOHN
(relieved; sotto)
Thank God.

SONNY
I prefer to address the jury now. What I have to say won't take long.

John sighs as Sonny lifts his tired body. John takes a peek at Sonny's note pad -- all X's and O's -- diagrammed plays. Jim smiles as Sonny shuffles over to the jury box.

SONNY
I apologize if I look tired, if my eyes are red, if my complexion is sallow, but I come by it honestly. I haven't slept much lately. For though my bed is soft, my client's is not. For though my home is comfortable, my friend's isn't. And while I'm surrounded by family, Jim Williams -- my client, my friend -- is locked up in a room full of thieves, murderers, and rapists.

Sonny slowly moves down the box, sizing up each juror, a smile here, a nod or wink there.

SONNY
Yep, you're the ones. You're the ones I want. You're the ones I trust. For though it is Jim Williams on trial here today, I look at the situation and think, 'There but for the grace of God...'

He shakes his head and straightens himself.

SONNY
You know why I say that? Because I guarandamtee you, if someone shoots at me in my house I'll shoot back. I'll shoot back again and again till I know they're dead! Till I know that my family and home are safe!
(walks to Largent)
And then my friend, Finley, he'll be prosecutin' me. I'll be on trial.

(CONTINUED)

125 CONTINUED: (2) 125

Finley Largent and his Assistant D.A.

ASSISTANT D.A.
(sotto)
He's way out of bounds!

LARGENT
He didn't object once during ours. We'll look like assholes.

Sonny winks at Largent and returns to the jury.

SONNY
Then my life will be in the hands of folks much like yourselves. Folks that, I hope, won't be swayed by cockeyed theories and fancy words. Folks that wouldn't judge a man by the color of his skin or by how much money he makes.

John smiles. Sonny rubs his face in his hands.

SONNY
I suppose I could follow the prosecution's lead and stand up here for hours tellin' you all about what the evidence will show, but unlike Finley, I trust you to look and listen for yerself. I will say that everything he said, we have evidence to the contrary. Everything his witnesses will say shall be refuted by the testimony of ours. Jim Williams murdered no one.

Sonny starts to move away from the jury, facing them, slowly backing up, one deliberate step after another. He touches a finger to his eye and then to his ear.

SONNY
Look... and... listen. Do so carefully. There but for the grace of God...

And he's back at the defense table. He takes his seat and leans back to John... *

SONNY
Find me some aspirin, will ya, coach?

126 INT. JAIL VISITOR'S ROOM - NIGHT 126

John sits, smiling. Jim is allowed in by a GUARD.

JIM
So, how did we do?
(beat)
Because I was pleased. Sonny has a certain flair.

JOHN
'Flair'? From what I saw today he could weave barnyard shit into Egyptian cotton.

Jim laughs, opens his arms and walks over to John. They hug.

JIM
John, do you understand that... that I consider you my friend?

Jim smiles in a way that lets John know he's sincere. John doesn't know what to say. So he nods.

127 INT. COURTROOM - DAY 127

Detective Boone's on the stand, finishing up direct examination...

BOONE
The lack of gunshot residue on the hand, plus the other things I mentioned, led me to the conclusion that the scene was contrived.

LARGENT
Thank you, Detective Boone. No further questions.

Sonny stands and meanders toward the podium.

SONNY
Detective, I wanna revisit some of the things you said on direct. You testified that there was blood on Hanson's hand, is that correct? *

BOONE
Yes, there was blood in the palm of the victim's hand. That's important because, if Hanson'd been holding the gun, there'd be no blood. *

(CONTINUED)

127 CONTINUED: 127

SONNY
You never saw blood on that palm, did you?

BOONE
No. The blood was noted in the autopsy report. I didn't turn them over when I bagged them.

SONNY
Now you also testified that you believed that the final shot that hit Hanson was fired from above him, is that correct?

BOONE
I concluded that the shot came from someone standing above the victim. Execution style. A coup de grace.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK FROM STUDY

BACK TO SCENE - INT. COURTROOM - LATER (PRESENT)

Henry Skerridge lies on a table in the middle of the courtroom. Sonny stands on one side of the table and Boone on the other.

SONNY
Now, Detective Boone, you've placed Mr. Skerridge in the exact position in which you found Billy Hanson, is that correct?

BOONE
Yes.

Sonny glances at the jury. "Watch this."

SONNY
Your report said that the shot was through the left temple?

BOONE
That's correct.

(CONTINUED)

127 CONTINUED: (2) 127

SONNY
But the left side of Henry's face is on the floor? Isn't it? *

Boone realizes he's caught. *

SONNY
So the shot to the head could not have been fired as the victim lay on the floor, isn't that right? *
(off Boone's stare)
Impossible. Like pouring water uphill, isn't it, Detective?

Henry and Sonny walk back to the defense table. Boone, unsure what to do, retakes his seat on the stand. *

JUDGE
Answer the question, if you can.

SONNY
That's okay, Y'Honor. I think he already did. Say, did you find Jim's prints on the gun in Billy's hand?

BOONE
The Luger handle has a textured surface.

SONNY
Was the answer, 'no'?

BOONE
Yes, the answer was 'no.'

Henry hands a photo to Sonny, who hands it to Boone.

SONNY
State's #22. Who's that good-lookin' fella there in the middle?

BOONE
That's me.

SONNY
And that?

BOONE
That's that reporter fella from up North. The one workin' with Williams.

(CONTINUED)

127 CONTINUED: (3) 127

John is puzzled, troubled by the comment.

BOONE
I don't know how he got in.

SONNY
(pointing)
And who's this guy?

BOONE
A young officer. Name escapes me.

SONNY
Understandable. You'd need a program to keep track of everybody in that study.

LARGENT
Objection. Counsel's testifying.

SONNY
Strike that. Finley's right, I'd rather have the detective tell us how many people are in that room.

BOONE
Seven, no eight.

SONNY
And one cat. You read the funny papers, Detective?

BOONE
Not often.

SONNY
Well, in the funnies, they got this puzzle and your task is to find the animal hidden there. Well, we're gonna play that game and we're gonna look for Shelton.

John can't help but smile.

LARGENT
Your Honor, I'm not sure what Mr. Seiler's trying to prove here but --

(CONTINUED)

127 CONTINUED: (4) 127

SONNY
-- Now, now, Finley, we can all play. 'Sheldon' is Shelton Williams, the defendant's tabby cat. Now, look at that shot and try to find him. *
(off Boone's look)
Little hint. Look at the rug.

Sonny points. The Detective sees the cat and reluctantly nods. Sonny takes the photo and hands it to the jury. Luther's eyes light up when he spots the cat. He shows it to his fellow jurors. They're enjoying the show.

SONNY
Detective, is Shelton Williams on your payroll? *
(off Boone's chuckle)
I've heard of cat burglars, is Shelton Williams a cat detective? *

BOONE
Don't be ridiculous.

SONNY
You saying the scene was secure, that's what's ridiculous.

128 EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY 128

Sonny and John exit the courthouse...

JOHN
What did Boone mean when he said I was 'working for Williams'?

SONNY
Finley knows you're friends. Friends look out for one another. At least now you won't have to testify.

JOHN
How can you be so sure?

SONNY
Because first thing this mornin' he struck you from his witness list.

CUT TO:

129 INT. POD - DAY 129

INSERT - TV

NANCY AMMONS, local TV reporter, stands in front of the courthouse and talks to camera.

The Guard lets Jim back into the cell. The TV is ON.

KILLER
Hey, Jim, look, they got a drawin' of you on TV.

(CONTINUED)

129 CONTINUED: 129

INSERT - TV

A SHOT OF an artist's sketch of Jim.

NANCY AMMONS (V.O.)
(on TV)
... the defendant, Jim Williams, sat calmly, watching as...

Jim enters the cell and looks up with a scowl.

JIM
God, how I've aged.

He sits. His cellmates look at him, sensing his fatigue.

KILLER
That don't look like you. You ain't got them bags under yer eyes.

BLACK INMATE
You look like a badass. Jus' sittin' there, sayin', 'Come on with it.'

Jim looks up, smiles.

KILLER (ELLIS)
He's right, Jim. A badass!

JIM
Thank you, Ellis.

130 EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY 130

John walks up the steps. Minerva stands waiting for him.

JOHN
Minerva. Where have you been?

MINERVA
Got other clients, other work to do. I just come today to tell you somethin' 'portant.

JOHN
What?

She grabs his arm.

(CONTINUED)

130 CONTINUED: 130

MINERVA
You tell that lawyer to be fair to the boy, you hear me?

JOHN
What boy...?

131 INT. COURTROOM - DAY 131

GEORGE TUCKER, 20, nervous, rather pathetic, sits at the witness stand. Finley is mid-direct exam... *

TUCKER
We hung around a lot. Billy had a car. He give me rides sometimes.

LARGENT
Mr. Tucker, do you, of your own knowledge, know anything of the relationship that existed between Billy Hanson and Jim Williams? *

SONNY
Objection, Your Honor!

CUT TO:

SIDEBAR - SONNY, LARGENT AND JUDGE

SONNY
If this boy says what I think he gonna, it'll be impossible to tell the jury to ignore it. You can't throw a skunk in the box then tell 'em they didn't smell it. *

LARGENT
Our intention with Mr. Tucker is to show that the victim was afraid of the defendant. To do that he has to describe, if he knows, the nature of their relationship. *

SONNY
His intention is to paint Jim pink. And besides, anything this boy says is second hand. Hearsay.

JUDGE
Objection overruled. But I'll give both sides some latitude.

(CONTINUED)

131 CONTINUED: 131

The attorneys return to their tables. Sonny -- to John...

SONNY
Well, coach, looks like you were right.

BACK TO DIRECT

LARGENT
Mr. Tucker, the question was, do you, of your own knowledge, know anything of the relationship that existed between the victim and the defendant? *

TUCKER
Yeahsir. Jim give Billy money when he needed it. He bought him a car and clothes for goin' to bed with him.

LARGENT
To sleep with him? To have sex with him?

TUCKER
Yeahsir.

Largent lets this fact settle in on the jury. Jim's demeanor stays cold. He slowly turns for a look at...

Margaret Williams -- a pained look on her face.

Mrs. Hanson -- an almost identical look.

LARGENT
Did Billy and Mr. Williams ever have disagreements, if you know?

TUCKER
All the time. Jim'd be pissed off at Billy for one thing or another. He was real jealous of Billy.

LARGENT
And what feelings, if any, did Billy have about the defendant?

TUCKER
Jim's a rich and powerful man. Billy was a little afraid of him.

(CONTINUED)

131 CONTINUED: (2) 131

LARGENT
Thank you, Mr. Tucker.

Sonny stands to cross-examine. He reaches in his pocket for a pen and, instead, pulls out a small bone with a tuft of hair attached. Not knowing what to do with it, he tosses it on the defense table.

John spots Minerva, reading a racing form.

SONNY
Mr. Tucker, how well did you know Billy Hanson? Were you and Billy close friends?

TUCKER
Yessir. He was about my best friend. Saw each other all the time. There's nothing he wouldn't do for me.

SONNY
And you'd do anything for him, wouldn't you, Mr. Tucker?

TUCKER
If yer trying to say I'm lyin', I'm not. Everything I'm sayin' is true.

The jurors are with Tucker on this one. Juror #1 (kind woman) even tries to console him with a nod.

SONNY
And how well did you know Jim Williams? Had you ever met?

TUCKER
Not to shake hands or nuthin', but I stood next to him in the emergency room when Billy O.D.ed.

SONNY
Billy overdosed on drugs? When was that?

TUCKER
About a month before Jim killed him.

(CONTINUED)

131 CONTINUED: (3) 131

SONNY
He overdosed on drugs and Mr. Williams took him to the hospital. Jim Williams saved Billy Hanson's life, didn't he?

TUCKER
Well, I dunno. I guess maybe you could say --

SONNY
Mr. Tucker, did you and Billy ever have sex?

TUCKER
No. No, sir...

SONNY
Do you know of a man named Jud Kilpatrick?

George's mind flounders with a hint of recognition.

SONNY
Strike that.
(beat)
Mr. Tucker, are you yourself a homosexual?

LARGENT
Objection! Relevance?

SONNY
Potential for bias. This sword has two sides, two blades, Your Honor.

JUDGE
I'll allow it.

SONNY
Need me to repeat that question, Mr. Tucker? Should we have the court reporter read it back <u>out loud</u>?

TUCKER
Nawsir, I ain't no fairy...! Okay, look, I've had some experiences, but I'm out of it now.

SONNY
Out of it?

(CONTINUED)

131 CONTINUED: (4) 131

TUCKER
Yeahsir. It's wrong. Bible says so.

SONNY
Bible says not to lie, too, doesn't it?
(beat)
How long you been 'out of it,' Mr. Tucker?

TUCKER
Um,... almost three weeks.

Sonny, nods, letting the silence work for him. Then...

SONNY
Congratulations, George.
(beat)
No further questions.

Sonny sits down. Jim, all smiles, leans back to John.

JOHN
Who's Jud Kilpatrick?

JIM
Union general. Led Sherman's 3rd Cavalry on their march through Georgia.

JOHN *
How come you never told me you * saved Billy's life? *

JIM *
Well, sport, you never asked. *

132 EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY 132

Nancy Ammons, the TV correspondent, gives her report.

NANCY AMMONS
Though the prosecution rested, it was the defense that fired the last shot. Local attorney Sonny Seiler, cross-examined George Tucker, a State's witness. *
Seiler's cross, though brief, was described by one observer as 'a brutally quick kill.'

John exits the courthouse behind her and crosses the street with some spring in his step. As he enters the square, he hears something. SOBBING.

Under a tree -- George Tucker sits, body throbbing as he cries. *

John's smile drops as he watches.

133 EXT. AIRPORT - DAY 133

A dozen Georgia boosters, all wearing red blazers, walk * across the tarmac to a private plane. Sonny, with Uga on * a leash (wearing a red sweater) walks and talks with John. *

SONNY
Finley's turned this thing into a circus. We need to paint a different picture of Billy than the one the jury heard today. That girl Corinne is nowhere to be * found so I subpoenaed your drag * queen. *

JOHN
She's pretty hard-headed.

SONNY
You think you can talk to her?

John shrugs a "maybe."

JOHN
It's not going to mean much unless Jim comes clean on his sexuality. *

SONNY
No way, Jose.

(CONTINUED)

133 CONTINUED: 133

JOHN
That jury heard George Tucker be honest. Don't you think they'd expect the same from the defendant?

SONNY
I'll think about it.
(smiles; remembers)
Oh, got something for ya.
(hands over a ticket)
The black fraternity holds a debutante ball every year. The firm makes a donation so they gimme a ticket. Why don't you go, learn about Savannah from another perspective?

Sonny and Uga start up the stairs to the plane.

SONNY
See you Monday morning. Go, Dawgs!

134 INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - DAY (SATURDAY) 134

John folds recently washed clothes and puts them away. The TV BLARES in the b.g.

BUCK BELEW (ANNOUNCER) (V.O.)
Three, two, one. This game's in the books. A big upset. Final score: Georgia 17 -- Notre Dame 10.

John smiles and changes the channel to --

INSERT - TV

Cuts of Ammons interviewing citizens...

TOURIST (V.O.)
We're just here on vacation, but everyone seems to think he's guilty. Where's Forsyth Park -- ?

WEALTHY BANKER (V.O.)
-- You know, of course, that he's not one of ours. He's not <u>from Savannah</u>. --

(CONTINUED)

134 CONTINUED: 134

STUDENT (V.O.)
-- The dude's obviously guilty. --

SOCIALITE IN DARK GLASSES (V.O.)
-- I'd rather not comment but there does seem to be quite a lot of evidence pointing at Jim. --

HOUSEWIFE (V.O.)
-- Even if he's not convicted, he'll be judged again. 'It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Matthew: 19:24' --

COUNTRY CLUB GENT (V.O.)
-- He's not from wealth, you know.

CLOSEUP - JOHN

He realizes Sonny has his work cut out for him.

135 EXT. STREET - ACROSS FROM DIXIE'S - DAY 135

John, standing on the sidewalk across from Dixie's Flowers, considers whether to go see Mandy. He wants to, but, after a few seconds, he walks away.

136 INT. CHABLIS' LIVING ROOM - DAY 136

Chablis paces around the room like a tigress, ripping a piece of paper to shreds. John tries to reason...

JOHN
It's a subpoena, Chablis!

CHABLIS
They play rough with the Doll and she'll turn State's evidence!

John sits, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

JOHN
A man's life could be at stake.

Chablis calms down.

CHABLIS
Bring some cute boys to my show tonight and we'll talk.

(CONTINUED)

136 CONTINUED: 136

JOHN
I've gotta go to some cotillion.

CHABLIS
No?! The Alpha Phi Alpha ball?! *
Ooh, John, take me! I'll be on my best behavior. I won't cuss or dance dirty or shake my butt. I ain't never been to a real ball.

JOHN
I can't, Chablis. These girls, they're debutantes.

CHABLIS
Oh, so you think I'm not good enough to clientele with them fancy ass black folks. What makes me less than them?

JOHN
I don't know. Debs are usually carefully scrutinized.
(not getting anywhere)
Okay, well, for starters, I doubt any of them have ever been caught shoplifting.

CHABLIS
Then they mus' be real good at it.

JOHN
I imagine they do volunteer work; go to church; stay out of bars.

CHABLIS
You sure these girls are black?
(as John nods, laughs)
Then they mus' be real ugly.

MUSIC UP -- "DON GIOVANNI" SWELLS...

137 INT. HYATT BALLROOM - NIGHT 137

Twenty young black women in full-length gowns dance the Minuet with their black-tie-and-tails escorts. Perfect symmetry proves that all the hours of practice paid off. The room seems to rise and fall with each gliding step.

John, sitting at a center table, shakes hands with several ALPHAS (30s - 50s) and their wives, ALPHABETTES.

(CONTINUED)

137 CONTINUED: 137

ALPHA
This is our 40th year.

JOHN
It's lovely.

ALPHA
Yessir, I do believe we've almost caught the white cotillion!

John politely smiles and takes a sip of his drink. He almost chokes when he spots...

Chablis, in a slim-fitting blue evening gown with rhinestones, standing in the doorway, scanning the crowd.

John slides down in his chair.

Chablis moves through the crowd, her butt sashaying to and fro, a half beat behind her shoulder sways -- like a pendulum clock that loses a few seconds a minute. She smiles at the men and smirks at the dowdy women.

EMCEE (O.S.)
And now, fathers and daughters!

The escorts bow and allow the debutantes' fathers to step in and continue the dance. One of the escorts, PHILLIP, takes a seat at John's table.

CHABLIS (O.S.)
Excuse me. Is this spot taken?

John cringes as Chablis smoothly whisks a seat from an adjacent table and pulls it up beside Phillip.

PHILLIP
No, ma'am.

CHABLIS
Don't call me ma'am. My name's Chablis. What's yours?

PHILLIP
Phillip. I'm an escort.

CHABLIS
Ooo, child. An escort! You work for one of them datin' services?

PHILLIP
I'm escorting my sister.

(CONTINUED)

137 CONTINUED: (2) 137

CHABLIS
You doin' it with your sister?!

PHILLIP
Oh, no. George, my sister's boyfriend, didn't wanna come, so I got roped into it.

Chablis smiles and starts to gently stroke his arm.

CHABLIS
Tell me, Phillip, you ever been arrested?

PHILLIP
No, well, once, sorta. Me'n a couple guys had a few drinks and got a ticket for disturbin' the peace.

CHABLIS
Ooo, I bet you did.

ALPHABETTE
I've been admiring your gown.

Chablis turns to the woman next to her and smiles.

CHABLIS
This lil' ol' thing?

ALPHABETTE
It's very glamorous. Of whom are you a guest?

Chablis scans a program to find a name. The band breaks into a pop number and couples hit the floor to dance.

CHABLIS
LaVella. She's my cousin.

ALPHABETTE
LaVella's a lovely girl.

CHABLIS
She wanted this so bad. Talked about it since we were kids. She was afraid she wouldn't make it.

ALPHABETTE
She had nothing to worry about.

(CONTINUED)

137 CONTINUED: (3) 137

CHABLIS
That's what I told her. I mean, if Vanessa Williams can pull one over on 'Miss America,' then a little whorin' around in Atlanta ain't gonna raise eyebrows with no two-bit steering committee in Savannah.

Alphabette is in shock. Chablis grabs Phillip's arm.

CHABLIS
Now, come on, Phillip. Let's go disturb a lil' peace. *

They walk to the dance floor and start to gyrate. Chablis, working it hard, turns, grabs her ankles and shakes her ass in Phillip's face. He's loving it.

John, having seen enough, excuses himself from his table and marches onto the dance floor. Not knowing how to proceed, he taps Phillip on the shoulder. Phillip concedes, leaving John staring at Chablis as she dances.

JOHN
What the hell are you doing here?

CHABLIS
Girls just wanna have fun.

John, feeling awkward, starts to move to the music a bit, just as the band slows it down with a sultry rendition of "Moon River." Chablis, without missing a beat, snuggles up to John and rests her head on his shoulder.

CHABLIS
Relax, John. Enjoy yourself for once.

And she grabs his ass. John snatches her hand and ushers her off the dance floor to a quiet bar in the back of the room. Chablis waves a finger at the bartender.

CHABLIS
Two apple schnapps. Doubles.

The bartender pours two glasses full and slides them forward. Chablis gives John a look -- "Pay the man." John does. Chablis raises her glass in a toast.

(CONTINUED)

137 CONTINUED: (4) 137

CHABLIS
My top to your bottom
My bottom to your top
My middle to your middle
Be good, you jus' might get a little.
(kills her drink)
Smile. Your star witness is testifying.

JOHN
You are?

CHABLIS
How can I refuse? You been so nice; treatin' me like I was important, like I was somebody special. That doesn't happen a lot. People can be pretty mean.

John nods understanding. Chablis smiles at him.

CHABLIS
John, do you think I'm... pretty?

JOHN
Uh, yes.

CHABLIS
Not... your type, though?

He pauses, trying to choose his words carefully. Picking up on his hesitation, she smiles sadly. It hits him...

JOHN
Chablis, are you testifying <u>for me</u>?

CHABLIS
You think I care what happens to Mr. Jim Williams? Never even met him. * *

JOHN
On cross-examination they'll look at your background -- your arrests, your life, your livelihood.

CHABLIS
I ain't ashamed of nuthin'.

(CONTINUED)

137 CONTINUED: (5) 137

JOHN
Okay, the fact is... you taking the stand is a blanket indictment of Billy.

CHABLIS
So, if he hung out with a drag queen, he deserved to die? *

JOHN
Maybe... you shouldn't testify.

CHABLIS
How sweet. You care about me.

His silence gives an answer. He does care. She tears up, then wipes it away and holds up her glass for a refill.

CHABLIS
I'll testify. You see, boyfriend, they may be usin' me, but the doll is usin' them right back. That courtroom's my comin' out party. I am the Lady Chablis. Hear me roar!
(off John's smile)
Besides, I already bought a new ensemble. *

138 INT. COURTROOM - DAY 138

Sonny at the defense table.

SONNY
Defense calls Chablis DeVeau.

Largent checks his witness list.

LARGENT
Your Honor, I don't have -- *

SONNY
Frank -- The Lady Chablis DeVeau. *

Largent takes his seat with a smile. All heads turn to the back of the courtroom. The double-doors open and in walks... Chablis, dressed to the nines in an elegant, professional suit, topped off with a chic hat tilted to one side. As she strolls the catwalk, she winks at John.

(CONTINUED)

138 CONTINUED: 138

SONNY
(sotto, to John)
Nice legs.

The crowded courtroom buzzes as Chablis takes the stand.

139 INT. COURTROOM - DAY (LATER) 139

Sonny directs Chablis...

SONNY
Miss DeVeau, I need to ask you a question and I want you to answer to the jury, to help them understand.

CHABLIS
You want me to explain my T, don'tcha?

Sonny's confused. He turns to John. John nods.

SONNY
Your T. Yes, I do. In as plain a language as you can.

Chablis turns to the jury.

CHABLIS
I could throw out words or labels to defend who I am, but you folks look nice, so I'll just tell it like it is.
(beat)
I got a man's toolbox, but everything else about me is pure lady. I wear women's clothes, I luv to shop, I luv to have my nails done and I luv men. Any questions?

The jurors trade looks. A couple even shake their heads.

CHABLIS
(to juror, re: dress)
Blue is definitely your color.

SONNY
Um, okay, thank you. Now, exactly how did you and the deceased, Billy Hanson, meet?

(CONTINUED)

139 CONTINUED: 139

CHABLIS
He hit on me -- strike that, Y'Honor. We met at the club and clienteled for a couple of weeks --

SONNY
-- Clienteled?

CHABLIS
Socialized. That's when he met Corinne, my roommate. He stayed over to the house a lot.

SONNY
Billy and Corinne were intimate?

CHABLIS
Oh, yes, honey. You know it.

SONNY
During the time you were with the deceased, did you know him to use drugs?

CHABLIS
Pills, weed, coke. He sold, so sometimes we had a little stash on the side.

SONNY
Do you yourself use drugs?

CHABLIS
A sniff of weed every once in a while. I'm a mellow girl.

SONNY
What effect, if you know, did the use of drugs have on Billy and Corinne's relationship, if any?

CHABLIS
He was hostile when he was high.

SONNY
Could you explain what you mean by hostile'?

CHABLIS
I can do better than that. One time he was raisin' hell and I told him to leave. He didn't care for that.

(CONTINUED)

139 CONTINUED: (2) 139

She reaches in her purse, pulls out her driver's license, stands and hands it to the juror nearest her.

CHABLIS
My driver's license. Look at my eye. Right hook.

LARGENT
Objection!

CHABLIS
Look like that dog in 'Little Rascals.'

Jim laughs heartily and John slides down in his seat.

JUDGE
Take your seat!

CHABLIS
Don't get huffy with me!

She sits and straightens her hat.

JUDGE
Bailiff, collect that item! Jury, you're to disregard --

CHABLIS
-- What's the problem? I'm not lyin' --

JUDGE
-- Quiet!

LARGENT
Your Honor, the people most strenuously object to --

JUDGE
-- Quiet!

Calm settles over the courtroom. The Judge leans over...

JUDGE
Mr. DeVeau -- *

CHABLIS
-- Miss. I'm a single girl, Y'Honor

(CONTINUED)

139 CONTINUED: (3) 139

JUDGE
Here's how it works: they ask questions, you answer them. You don't produce photos and when I say stop, you stop. Do we understand each other? *

CHABLIS
Yes.

The Judge sighs and nods to Sonny.

SONNY
Miss DeVeau, were you surprised to learn of Billy's death?

CHABLIS
It was a shock but not really unexpected.

SONNY
What do you mean by that?

CHABLIS
He always said --

LARGENT
-- Objection. Hearsay.

CHABLIS
-- that he was gonna die in Mercer House.

SONNY
Goes to state of mind, Judge.

JUDGE
Overruled. Answer stands.

SONNY
'Gonna die in Mercer House.' Do you know what he meant by that?

CHABLIS
He figured if he died in that ritzy house he'd get himself a headstone in Old Bonaventure Cemetery, maybe even a statue. That was his dream.

SONNY *
His dream?

(CONTINUED)

139 CONTINUED: (4) 139

CHABLIS
Yeah, but all he got was a marker in the new section. Tacky. *

Mrs. Hansford wipes a tear.

SONNY
Miss DeVeau, have you ever met the defendant?

CHABLIS
No. I've only seen him once in my life -- at the emergency room when Billy O.D'ed. *

SONNY
Billy overdosed on drugs? *

CHABLIS
Yeah. About a month before the shooting. Mr. Williams found him and took him to the emergency room.

SONNY
That's all, Y'Honor. *

Finley Largent stands to cross.

LARGENT
Miss DeVeau, you're not a masochist, are you?

CHABLIS
No, honey. That's not my kink.

LARGENT
And it's obvious that you have a good self-image.

CHABLIS
Thank you for noticin'. *

LARGENT
You wouldn't waste your time hangin' around with someone who wasn't worthy. You wouldn't let someone live in your house who wasn't a person of character, now would you? * * * * *

CHABLIS
Certainly not.

(CONTINUED)

139 CONTINUED: (5) 139

LARGENT
Billy Hanson was good to you, wasn't he? In fact, Billy Hanson was kind to you, considerate of you, wasn't he?

CHABLIS
I hope I didn't give the wrong impression. Billy could be a sweet boy. He treated me like a Queen...

Largent smiles and nods, urging her on...

CHABLIS
... when he wasn't wailin' on me.

140 INT. JAIL - VISITING ROOM - DAY 140

Jim stands at the window, deep in thought. Sonny sits at the table where John is pulling food from a bag.

JOHN
Mrs. Wright threw in some gumbo.

JIM
How are our character witnesses coming?

SONNY
We decided to limit it to three. We don't want too much fawning.

JIM
And why not? John, tell Sonny about all the friends I have that are dying to defend me.
(beat)
I suggest Wanda Javitz. She has a commanding vocal presence.

John and Sonny share a look.

JOHN
She, uh... declined, Jim.

JIM
Declined...?
(sits)
They clamored for my friendship, hoping, praying for an invitation to my parties. Where was their morality <u>then</u>?

(CONTINUED)

140 CONTINUED: 140

Jim's introspective look turns to a nasty smile.

JIM
Well, I hope Wanda understands this definitely puts her in the 'out box' for my Christmas party.

SONNY
I'm not worried about character witnesses. They got theirs, we got ours. *

JIM
When will I take the stand?

SONNY
Last. *

JIM
Good. They'll have heard all the theories, we'll finish them with the truth!

Jim bangs on the table, grins, stands and struts.

JIM
I'm very much looking forward to this. You know why? Because it's important not only for me to be acquitted, but for everyone to know I'm innocent. I refuse to live in a world where whispers become fact. Guilty men murmur, the innocent shout to the rafters! *

SONNY
Uh, Jim, we might need you to come clean on your, uh, relationship with Billy. *

JIM
(instantly depressed)
Oh.

SONNY
Finley's taken this thing in a direction we weren't countin' on.

JIM
To hear that come from my mouth... would destroy Mother.

(CONTINUED)

140 CONTINUED: (2) 140

JOHN
She was in court. She heard Tucker. She knows about it. *

JIM
Not from me she doesn't.

John considers this before floating a balloon...

JOHN
What if... she wasn't in court...?

141 INT. MERCER HOUSE - DAY 141

John sits in the drawing room with Margaret Williams. Tea and scones. John puts down his saucer.

JOHN
Parts of Jim's testimony could be, well, could be unsavory.

MARGARET
You're speaking of the horrible things said about James and that boy?

JOHN
Yes, ma'am. He doesn't want it brought up in front of you.

She takes a sip of tea.

MARGARET
John, are you familiar with King James?

JOHN
I know he commissioned a version of the Bible.

MARGARET
Yes, well, it seems to me, I remember hearing that King James himself had favorites among the men in his court. Have you by any * chance heard that? *

JOHN
Well, as a matter of fact, I think I have. *

141A INT. CHURCHILL'S BAR - NIGHT 141A

John finishes a beer and orders another. He's had a few. Sonny enters and takes a seat next to John at the bar.

JOHN
She wants to know if she can sit outside the courtroom?

Sonny nods absently. He's perplexed, deep in thought.

JOHN
What?

SONNY
Damn gunshot residue test.

JOHN
Your expert witness covered that. He said the tests were unreliable.

SONNY
The jury thinks that's a cop-out. Everyone of 'em knows Doc Poe. Why they gonna listen to some egghead from up north. No offense.

JOHN
He said that gunpowder's easily wiped off. Maybe when they were handling --

SONNY
-- Boone said he bagged 'em and Doc Poe said they were bagged when he performed the autopsy. How the hell would it get rubbed off?

John nods, looks around the bar, thinks out loud...

JOHN
Remember when you told me 'Dead men tell no tales'?
(off Sonny's look)
May be true for other places but it doesn't apply here. Look around. Every picture on every wall is of someone who's gone. Every tale you hear begins with a person who's no longer around. There are more cemeteries than hospitals in Savannah. This town's a necropolis, Sonny. A monument to the dead.

(CONTINUED)

141A CONTINUED: 141A

SONNY
What the hell you talkin' about, Coach?

John pours his beer in a to-go cup and stands to leave.

JOHN
Billy may not be talkin' but his hands sure seem to be.

SONNY
Where you goin'?

JOHN
'To unnerstan' the livin' you gots to commune wif the dead.'

141B EXT. DIXIE'S FLOWER SHOP - NIGHT 141B

Mandy closes up; turns off the light and locks the door. John, Traveler in hand approaches.

JOHN
Feel like a walk?

MANDY
Where you headed?

JOHN
The morgue.

She laughs then realizes he's serious. Nods to his cup.

MANDY
How long you been at the bar?

JOHN
Long enough to see things clearly.

MANDY
Why?

JOHN
If I could answer that I wouldn't need to go.

MANDY
Well the morgue's closed. And by tomorrow, trust me, this won't seem like such a great idea.

(CONTINUED)

141B CONTINUED: 141B

JOHN
Precisely the reason I'm going tonight. I'll break in if I have to. Pretend I'm dead.

He continues on his way. Mandy sighs.

MANDY
You sure you wanna do this?

He stops, smiles.

MANDY
There's a back way... a hallway off the emergency room. Of course it's off limits.

JOHN
We'll create a distraction.

MANDY
We?...

JOHN
You distract and I'll slide by.

MANDY
You'll get lost.

JOHN
So it's a three man job. Where's Joe?

MANDY
Perfect casting but he's out of town till tomorrow.

JOHN
Okay, so who do we know that can create a commotion?

142 thru 147 OMITTED 142 thru 147

148 INT. CANDLER EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT 148

The on-duty nurse, SARA WARREN, stands behind the desk doing paperwork. An orderly reads the paper. A DRUNK with a cut on his forehead is the only patient waiting. *

(CONTINUED)

148 CONTINUED: 148

The pneumatic doors open and in stumbles Chablis, groaning and holding her stomach.

CHABLIS
Oh God, help me!

She collapses on the floor in dramatic fashion.

CHABLIS
I'm dyin'! My chest. I think I gotta appendeecitus.

The orderly helps Sara lift Chablis into a wheelchair. Sara reaches over and hits the intercom.

SARA
Doctor, we need you in Exam Four. *

The Drunk watches as they disappear down the hall, then turns to see... the doors swing open once again and John and Mandy enter. Mandy gives the room a once-over and motions for John to follow her down a hallway. *

A SCREAM BELLOWS from down the hall.

CHABLIS (O.S.)
Oh Gawd! The pain, the pain!

John laughs, almost losing it. Mandy covers his mouth to squelch the noise. They walk down the hall to a door. Mandy opens it. *

148A INT. COMPLETELY DARK ROOM - NIGHT 148A

We see nothing. We hear the HUM of a REFRIGERATION UNIT. Then a door opens revealing two backlit figures. Mandy flicks on a light. They stare at...

Fifteen or so bodies, wrapped in clear plastic, on gurneys and shelves.

Mandy and John stare at the bodies. We see their breath. John's no longer giddy; he's frozen.

149 INT. EXAM ROOM - NIGHT (SAME TIME) 149

Chablis screams as a DOCTOR pokes and prods her stomach. An orderly holds her down. *

DOCTOR
Is this where it hurts?

(CONTINUED)

149 CONTINUED: 149

CHABLIS
Lower! Oh Gawd!

149A INT. MORGUE - NIGHT (SAME TIME) 149A

John, still frozen. Mandy eyes him.

MANDY
Well, you're here. Commune away.

John stares without blinking. Mandy strolls through the room, eyeing the bodies.

MANDY
You're scared, huh?

Mandy seems to recognize someone and pulls the plastic sheet off an old man's head.

MANDY
Teddy Lipscomb.

John takes a cautious step forward.

JOHN
You... knew him?

MANDY
My Dad's barber.

John ventures a look at a chart hanging from the gurney.

JOHN
Cardiac arrest.

MANDY
Medical term for dyin' in the arms of a 25-year-old cocktail waitress.

John, loosening up a bit, glances around the room.

JOHN
Remind me not to get sick in Savannah.
(off her look)
They're all wearing I.D. bracelets. People are supposed to get well in hospitals.

(CONTINUED)

149A CONTINUED: 149A

MANDY
The morgue doesn't have a ramp. All D.O.A.'s come through the emergency room, so technically they have to be admitted. Bureaucratic red tape.
(off his look)
I candy-striped one summer.

John snaps to a thought.

JOHN
Would you have to take a bag off a hand to put the I.D. bracelet on?

Mandy shrugs. John heads for the door.

150 OMITTED 150

151 INT. EXAM FOUR - NIGHT (SAME TIME) 151

The Doctor prods Chablis' abdomen.

CHABLIS
There -- but lower!

He pokes her groin, gets a funny look on his face, pokes again. Chablis' screams stop and she smiles sexily...

CHABLIS
Oooh, yeah, that's the spot, Doc!

IN HALLWAY

John rushes past. Mandy stops long enough to look at Chablis and run a finger across her throat. "We're done here."

151A INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT 151A

The Drunk moans in the corner. John strides toward Sara Warren behind the desk.

JOHN
Were you on duty when Billy Hanson's body came in?

(CONTINUED)

151A CONTINUED: 151A

SARA
Yeah. Where'd you come from? How'd you get back there?

JOHN
Back door, got lost. Hanson's hands were bagged. Someone had to put an I.D. bracelet on his wrist. Would you have to remove a bag to put the bracelet on?

SARA
No. They snap on.

John's brainstorm dies. Mandy and Chablis enter the room. The Drunk moans.

CHABLIS
Oh, hush up. You'll live.

The Drunk quiets down. John turns to leave...

SARA
Course with him it was easy because I didn't put the bags on till after.

John stops in his tracks.

JOHN
Excuse me?

SARA
Doc Poe called and said he thought it'd be done at the crime scene, but if the hands weren't bagged to bag them.

JOHN
You're kidding? <u>You</u> bagged them?

She nods, reaches in a file and produces a document.

SARA
I wrote it up, right here on the Admissions sheet.

151B INT. CHURCHILL'S BAR - NIGHT 151B

Sonny speaks loudly into the bar phone...

(CONTINUED)

151B CONTINUED: 151B

SONNY
I'm supposed to meet with Jim to go over his testimony. You go; have him sit tight. I'll get a subpoena for the admission form. And don't say nuthin' to him till I got it in hand.

151C INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT 151C

John hangs up the phone, turns to Mandy...

JOHN
Stick around until Sonny gets here with the subpoena, okay? I'll call you later.

152 thru 154 OMITTED 152 thru 154

155 INT. JAIL VISITING ROOM - DAY 155

Jim and John sit, waiting for Sonny. John checks his watch, anxious.

JIM
While we're waiting, sport, there's something I'd like to run by you. About that night...

Jim, the cat that ate the canary, leans back confidently.

JIM
The evening started out just as I've always said.

156 FLASHBACK - INT. MERCER HOUSE - NIGHT 156

The house is still cluttered from the party. Jim and Billy stand in the hall, arguing, gesturing at one another.

JIM (V.O.)
The argument, the shouting...

Jim points to the door and then retreats to the study. Billy follows him, stands in the door and continues shouting.

(CONTINUED)

156 CONTINUED: 156

Then he marches back out into the hall, pushes over a Grandfather clock and runs into the study. Jim yells after him and stares at the downed clock.

JIM (V.O.)
... the damaged clock...

Jim returns to his desk in the study and picks up the phone. Billy reappears and enters with a Luger and plants himself in front of Jim's desk.

JIM (V.O.)
... Billy pointing the Luger. But here's the difference:

Billy points the gun at Jim, says something, and pulls the trigger. Nothing.

JIM (V.O.)
When Billy pulled the trigger nothing happened! The gun was on safety!

Billy looks at the gun and fumbles with the safety. Jim reaches in his desk, extracts a Luger of his own -- just as Billy turns off the safety and points his --

JIM (V.O.)
While he was fumbling to take off the safety, I grabbed my own gun --

Jim FIRES THREE TIMES rapidly. Billy's body contorts and spins then topples onto the floor.

JIM (V.O.)
-- and shot him. I fired three times. He fell dead.

157 BACK TO SCENE - VISITOR'S ROOM 157

John is in shock. He can't believe what he's hearing.

JOHN
He... never fired...?

JIM
No. I thought: Goddamn, what have I done?

158 FLASHBACK - INT. STUDY - NIGHT 158

Jim sets down his gun, walks around the desk, looks at Billy's body and covers his mouth with his hand. After a few seconds he reaches down and picks up Billy's GUN.

JIM (V.O.)
I went over, picked up his gun --

Jim FIRES TWICE back at the desk, wildly. The FIRST HITS the WALL, the SECOND BLASTS into PAPERS on the desk.

JIM (V.O.)
-- and fired two shots across the desk. In the panic of the moment I didn't know what else to do.

159 BACK TO SCENE - VISITOR'S ROOM 159

Jim smiles at John, who just stares.

JIM
It explains why there was no powder on Billy's hand! When I tell this to the jury, Largent's case will crumble. *

JOHN
If you tell that story you'll be admitting that you lied to the police, lied to the press, lied to everyone.

JIM
Yes, of course. So?

John sits, stunned. Sonny comes barreling into the room, admittance sheet in hand.

SONNY
Keep your seat. Yer gonna need it.

JIM
Sonny, there's something I need to tell you.

SONNY
Me first. You know how that residue test is giving us fits?

JIM
What I have to say has direct bearing --

(CONTINUED)

159 CONTINUED: 159

SONNY
-- Jus' hear me out.

Jim sighs and sits back.

SONNY
We got 'em by the gonads, Jimbo. Boone lied. Doc Poe called the admitting nurse at Candler and said to bag the hands if they weren't already. So she did. Says so right on this form. No tellin' how many people handled him between the crime scene and the hospital. That's how the powder got rubbed off.

He hands the sheet to Jim, who reads the relevant part.

SONNY
The death knell of Finley Largent's precious gunshot residue test.
(sits back, grinning)
Okay, your turn. What was it you wanted to say?

Jim looks once at John with a hint of menace.

JIM
It's not important.

John looks on, devastated. Then he slowly rises and walks out the door. Sonny looks to Jim. Jim shrugs.

160 EXT. JOE ODOM'S PORCH - NIGHT 160

John, run through the wringer, stands at the front door. It opens and Mandy appears.

MANDY
What? What's wrong?

All John can do is shake his head. They stare at one another for an extended, silent moment. John takes a step and kisses her lightly on the nose. Mandy closes her eyes and... her feet arch as she stands on her toes.

John kisses her lightly on the forehead, then once, softly, on the lips. Mandy's eyes open.

JOHN
To hell with Sammy Jenks.

They kiss passionately. Pent-up emotion. They tumble...

161 INT. MANDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 161

... into Mandy's bed, still kissing, fondling, embracing as if the world ends at midnight.

DISSOLVE TO:

162 INT. MANDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (LATER) 162

Mandy is asleep. John, fully dressed, sits in a chair, staring at Mandy, thinking. Then he rises to leave. *

MANDY
What's the problem, Kelso?

She's awake. John, busted, searches for the right answer.

JOHN
I don't know. I probably shouldn't have... The last thing I want is to hurt you in any way. *

MANDY
So why do I feel like someone just gut-shot me? *

John doesn't know how to answer. He shuffles out of the room. *

163 INT. SONNY'S OFFICE - DAY 163

John and Sonny...

JOHN
I just thought you should know that last night Jim told me a version of the shooting, a very different version of -- *

SONNY
-- Whoa! Stop right there. How did he preface this? *

JOHN
Well, he said, 'Sport, there's something I'd like to run by you.' *

SONNY
Big deal. So Jim told a hypothetical. I came up with theories, why can't he? *

(CONTINUED)

163 CONTINUED: 163

JOHN
Because he's the only one who knows the truth!

SONNY
John, lawyers are like painters. The law, in its infinite wisdom, gave us colors to work with. The D.A., he gets black and white; we get everything in between. Me, I'm content with that.

He stands, puts on his jacket...

SONNY
You know how many shades of gray there are? Sherwin Williams has 30. And sales are good.

... and walks out.

SONNY (V.O.)
At this time the defense would like to recall Detective Frank Boone.

164 INT. COURTROOM - DAY 164

Boone on the stand.

SONNY
I only have one question, Detective. Are you absolutely sure you bagged Billy Hanson's hands at the crime scene?

BOONE
Yes.

SONNY
Okay, that's it. Thanks.

JUDGE
Redirect, Mr. Largent?

Largent, confused, looks to his colleagues.

LARGENT
Uh, no, Your Honor.

SONNY
Defense calls Sara Warren, R.N.

164 CONTINUED: 164

Boone, stepping down, gets a funny look on his face. Largent looks at his witness list.

SONNY
She's not on your list. Miss Warren is a direct rebuttal witness to the testimony of Detective Boone. She's an admitting nurse at Candler Emergency room. *

Largent's face falls. Boone slumps into a seat. Sara Warren walks into the courtroom.

165 INT. JIM WILLIAMS' BEDROOM - DAY 165

John pulls clothes from the closet. He freezes and stares at the portrait of Jim. Jim's eyes seem to stare back.

SONNY (V.O.)
Mr. Williams, could you describe your relationship with the deceased? *

166 INT. VISITOR'S ROOM - DAY 166

John walks in, hands Jim a freshly pressed suit and, without a word, walks out. Jim watches him go and smiles.

JIM (V.O.)
I hired Billy to refinish furniture. He had some talent and I wanted to encourage him.

167 INT. COURTROOM - DAY 167

Jim, on the stand for direct examination by Sonny. (NOTE: Sonny seems to be staring a hole through Jim. Jim never loses his cool.) *

JIM
During this time I developed hypoglycemia. I blacked out at times. Billy stayed over at the house to help when I wasn't feeling well. *

(CONTINUED)

167 CONTINUED: 167

SONNY
Was that the extent of your relationship? *

JIM
Over time it evolved into something less formal. We became intimate. He could be quite charming. He had his girl friends, I had mine. But to me, sex is a perfectly natural thing. Didn't bother me. Didn't bother him. It was just an occasional, natural thing that occurred between consenting adults.

The jurors stare, trying to figure what to make of Jim.

Minerva, on the back row, shakes her head, disappointed. *

168 INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY 168

Margaret Williams sits on a bench, reading a book. *

169 INT. COURTROOM - DAY (LATER) 169

Jim, still on the stand, still on direct.

JIM
I ordered Billy out of the house. That's when he went out into the hall, knocked over the clock and came back with a gun in his hand. He said, and I'll never forget it as long as I live, he said --

170 FLASHBACK - INT. STUDY - NIGHT 170

Billy enters with the Luger, marches to his position in front of Jim's desk, points the gun and "says" -- (Billy's mouth moves but it's Jim's voice we hear.)

JIM (V.O.)
-- 'I'll leave tomorrow, but goddamit, you're leaving tonight!' The minute I saw the Luger I reached into the drawer for my own weapon.

(CONTINUED)

170 CONTINUED: 170

Jim pulls out a Luger, starts to rise and Billy FIRES once past Jim's shoulder, the BULLET BLASTING into the wall.

JIM (V.O.)
As I was coming up from my seat I felt the first shot breeze by my shoulder. I fired.

Jim, standing, FIRES once. Billy, hit in the chest, pulls the trigger again and a bullet hits papers on the desk. Jim FIRES TWICE more and Billy drops dead. *

JIM (V.O.)
I don't remember how many times. *

END OF FLASHBACK.

171 BACK TO COURTROOM 171

JIM
It was horrible.

Jim sits back, the "painful memory" resting on his face. John, smiling cynically, stares at Jim long and hard.

172 INT. COURTROOM - LARGENT - DAY (LATER) 172

on cross.

LARGENT
Lastly, Mr. Williams, I'd like to discuss your relationship with Billy. You indicated that you and Hanson had sex, is that right?

JIM
Yes. From time to time.

LARGENT
And you feel that sex is a perfectly natural thing?

JIM
It's not only just natural. At the time, Billy was a hustler on Bull Street, selling himself to anyone who would pay for it.

LARGENT
He'd been a street kid since the age of 14, I think you indicated?

(CONTINUED)

172 CONTINUED: 172

JIM
Oh, yes.

LARGENT
An eighth grade drop-out and something on the order of 20 years old, is that right?

JIM
He was 21. He was no child.

LARGENT
You were 46 and he was 21. Was that, to use your words, a 'natural and normal' relationship? *

JIM
He may have been 21, but he had 46 years' worth of mileage on him. *

Largent milks the silence for all it's worth, then looks at the jury, shakes his head and sits down.

173 EXT. SAVANNAH - DAY 173

SERIES OF SHOTS (SAVANNAH, GEORGIA)

A) FACTOR'S WALK

Visitors walk down the narrow cobblestone street, past sidewalk cafes and flower vendors. A shrimp boat moves down the river in the b.g.

SONNY (V.O.)
We're all Savannahians. Cross paths from time to time. A smile here, a nod there.

B) PULASKI SQUARE

huge oak trees provide shade for an old-fashioned picnic party from another century. Men in jackets and boaters, women with parasols and hand fans.

SONNY (V.O.)
And even if we haven't met, we share a common bond -- this beautiful place we call home.

(CONTINUED)

173 CONTINUED: 173

C) VICTORIAN DISTRICT

a block of precise, restored Victorian homes, painted in blues and greens. A DOG BARKS at a paint crew touching up a front porch.

SONNY (V.O.)
And as one Savannahian to twelve, I wanna say thank you. Thank you for your civic pride, for your diligence, for your rapt attention. *

174 INT. COURTROOM - DAY 174

Sonny gives his closing arguments.

SONNY
The Prosecution started this whole thing out by quotin' somebody named Thomas Hobbes. Now I don't know who that is but I do know Matlock.
(beat)
Ya'll watch 'Matlock'?

Nods from the jury. They're in the palm of his hand.

SONNY
Me, too. Got me to thinkin' -- 'What would old Matlock do in my shoes?' I even asked around in case I missed an episode on point. Then I realized that if some T.V. writer tried to sell Andy Griffith this story, old Ange would say, 'That's not a good tale. I wouldn't have to be much of a lawyer to get that man off, now would I?' And he'd be right. By all appearances, by all evidence, Jim Williams is an innocent man. But, ladies and gentlemen, I'm not Lawyer Matlock, so I've got to scratch and tear at the prosecution's case. I've got to whittle it down to nuthin'.

He loosens his tie, just a bit. *

(CONTINUED)

174 CONTINUED: 174

SONNY
And darned if I don't think I've come close. There is one thing Jim's guilty of. Bad associations. If he's guilty of a lifestyle that you don't like or don't cotton to, remember we deal with these people, good and bad, every day. They're a part of our community. Don't judge him for that. This is God's world. Let this man go home. He's had enough. *

Sonny slowly turns and walks back to the defense table.

175 EXT. COURTHOUSE - NIGHT 175

TV crews and reporters, awash in generator-powered light, await the jury's decision.

176 INT. COURTHOUSE - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT 176

John, Henry, Sonny and Margaret sit quietly, waiting.

JUDGE (V.O.)
Mr. Foreman, have you reached a verdict?

177 INT. COURTROOM - NIGHT 177

On tenterhooks. Luther, the foreman, stands, nods.

VARIOUS SHOTS - FACES

John, Sonny, Jim, Margaret, Mrs. Hanson.

ANGLE

JUDGE
Mr. Foreman, deliver your verdict.

Luther pulls a piece of paper from his jacket. In so doing, a small vial flies from his pocket, lands on the courtroom floor and rolls to the feet of the Bailiff.

Every eye in the room is on the vial. Absolute silence.

(CONTINUED)

177 CONTINUED: 177

The Judge weighs his options, then nods to the Bailiff, who carefully picks up the vial and hands it to Luther. Luther nods thanks, re-pockets it, and clears his throat.

LUTHER
We the jury find the defendant... not guilty of all charges.

Bedlam. Jim shouts and hugs Margaret and Sonny. John slowly stands and walks out of the courtroom.

178 INT. SWEET GEORGIA BROWN'S - NIGHT 178

The place is ready to open. Joe unloads bottles of liquor behind the bar. John enters.

JOE
Well, well, I hear your book got itself a happy ending?

JOHN
You know, Joe, I'm not sure there's gonna be a book. Is Mandy around?

JOE
Nope. She said she needed to get outta town for a coupla days. You wouldn't think it has anything to do with a certain Yankee, now would ya?

JOHN
I just wanted to talk to her before I leave.

JOE
Leave? Hell, I was just startin' to hear a twang in yer voice.

JOHN
The place looks great, Joe. It's bound to be a big success.

JOE
Hope so. It goes under, I'll have to return to the practice of law... and we don't want that now, do we?

John smiles and leaves.

179 INT. JOHN'S CARRIAGE HOUSE - NIGHT 179

John starts to pack his things. He plucks the photo of Billy from his wall and stares at it. Then he throws it in the trash can and falls back into his easy chair. Just as he closes his eyes, he hears a WHISTLE from the lane. Then he hears it AGAIN and goes to the window...

Minerva, standing in the lane, goody-bag in hand.

MINERVA
Come on down. We gots to pay a visit to the boy. We gots to make him quit workin', James.

JOHN
The trial's over, Minerva. Billy can't do anything to Jim now.

MINERVA
Why I come to you? Because outta ever'body, you the one that know it ain't over. I know, the boy know, and you know... that justice ain't been done yet.

180 INT. OLDS - NIGHT 180 *

John drives, Minerva digs through her purse, finds a root.

JOHN
Bonaventure's closed, locked up.

MINERVA
Dead time don't stop for no one. 'Sides, I knows a back way.

181 EXT. OATLAND ISLAND - NIGHT 181

Minerva and John push through bullrushes and arrive at river's edge, where rests a Jon boat. Minerva crawls in. John hesitates.

JOHN
I don't know about this.

MINERVA
That's exactly why you come this far.

182 EXT. SAVANNAH RIVER CREEK - NIGHT 182

The Jon boat slides through the fog with John at the oars.

183 EXT. OLD BONAVENTURE CEMETERY - NIGHT 183

Spooky. A Poe story come to life -- statues, obelisks, columns, arches. John and Minerva emerge from the fog, dock the boat and step onto the spongy bank.

184 EXT. NEW BONAVENTURE - NIGHT 184

John and Minerva walk through the new, less beautiful, less Gothic section of the cemetery. Minerva stops.

ANGLE ON GRAVE PLAQUE

illuminated by moonlight.

BILLY CARL HANSON *
(murdered)

BACK TO SCENE

MINERVA
He ain't happy here. Ain't what he thought it'd be.

Minerva kneels and opens a full fifth of Wild Turkey. She pours some onto the grave, takes a snort and offers it to John. "What the hell" -- he takes a shot and hands it back. Minerva sets it on the gravestone.

MINERVA
If you ain't in heaven yet, you wanna get there, don't ya, boy? You gonna be dead a long time and the only way yer gonna move up is if you quit' playin' with James.

She leans down and whispers...

MINERVA
I has influence with the dead. * They can lif' you up. No one else gonna do that for you. Nobody, you hear me, boy?!

Minerva "listens" for a few seconds then straightens herself and points at the headstone, angry.

MINERVA
Don't laugh at me! You think you had a harsh life? You ain't got no idea.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

184 CONTINUED: 184

MINERVA (CONT'D)
You never had no bills to pay, no kids to feed, no house to clean. You done had it easy. Well, you can just lay there now!

She jumps up and charges off into the dark, leaving John staring at the grave. The CHURCH BELLS RING midnight. John, spooked, runs after her.

185 INT. MERCER HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY 185

Maggie allows John into the hallway, where he catches a glimpse of the dining room, where Jim entertains guests.

Maggie leads John into the study and motions to a seat directly over the spot where Billy died. John sits just as Jim walks in with a glass of wine and sits at the desk.

JIM
Thanks for stopping by.

Jim holds up a stack of 3x5 cards.

JIM
I have my Christmas party list together. You made the cut.

JOHN
I won't be here.

JIM
I'm disappointed.

JOHN
So obviously you've decided to stay in town.

JIM
Living here pisses off all the right people.

Jim sets a brown wrapped painting on the desk.

JIM
It's 'Newmarket Heath.' Yussopov's dagger might have been more useful, given your chosen profession, but the painting seemed somehow appropriate. Please accept it as an expression of my gratitude.

(CONTINUED)

185 CONTINUED: 185

John accepts the painting and looks to Jim.

JOHN
What <u>really</u> happened that night?

Jim stares at John. His look seems one part disappointed, one part pleased at the question. He opens his mouth, about to speak --

VOICE (O.S.)
-- <u>Jim</u>?... Main course!

Jim, trance broken, smiles at John.

AT FRONT DOOR

John, painting in hand, opens the door. Jim stands behind him in the hallway.

JIM
Sport...?
(as John turns)
Truth, like art... is in the eye of the beholder.

186 EXT. MERCER HOUSE - DAY 186

John crosses the street into Monterey Square. He can't help but turn back for one last look.

HIS POV

THROUGH the study window -- Jim, once again in silhouette, stands at the window.

187 INT. STUDY - DAY (SAME TIME) 187

Jim sips his wine and watches John walk away. Then the look on his face changes. He gasps for breath, grabs his chest, stumbles against the desk and falls on the floor -- in the exact spot he'd have fallen had Billy shot him.

CLOSEUP - JIM

black eyes open. He shudders as he sees...

(CONTINUED)

187 CONTINUED: 187

JIM'S POV

Billy, a few feet away, lying on the floor, staring, blood dripping from his lips as he, too, dies. Then he smiles a bloody smile.

NEW ANGLE - JIM

lying dead, alone in the room.

DISSOLVE TO:

188 EXT. OLD BONAVENTURE CEMETERY - DAY 188

Mourners look on as a casket is lowered into the ground. A huge monument with "WILLIAMS" front and center serves as headstone. John watches without emotion. He spots someone in the distance. *

HIS POV

SERENA DAWES sits on a bench in a family plot. *

188A EXT. BONAVENTURE - AIKEN FAMILY PLOT - DAY 188A

Serena sits on a marble bench and pours a martini. She spots John and smiles.

SERENA
Ah, I was hoping someone would join me to memorialize Jim in proper fashion.

John sits down. She pours another martini. They toast.

SERENA
To Jim.

A few feet away is a double gravestone -- "WILLIAM F. AIKEN" and "ANNA AIKEN."

SERENA
Conrad Aiken's parents.

JOHN
Conrad Aiken the poet?

(CONTINUED)

188A CONTINUED: 188A

SERENA
Yes. Papa killed Mama then turned the gun on himself. Conrad was ten at the time. He was raised with relatives up North but returned to Savannah for his final years. He spent quite a lot of time here.

JOHN
Where's Conrad buried?

SERENA
Oh, he's here. In fact we are very much his personal guests at the moment.

She moves the shaker between them to reveal that the bench they're sitting on is actually a gravestone. It reads:

CONRAD AIKEN
COSMOS MARINER, DESTINATION UNKNOWN

John shakes his head and smiles.

JOHN
No one ever really dies in this town, do they? Not really.

SERENA
What a comforting thought.
(beat)
You'll have to come visit me. We'll have grand parties with all the right people.
(off his confusion)
When I'm buried here. When Bonaventure becomes my home.

189 EXT. OLD BONAVENTURE - OUTSIDE GATE - DAY 189

John, alone, walks out the gate as limos and Cadillacs exit. He spots Minerva, standing behind a tree outside the cemetery. John walks over. She looks him over.

JOHN
Why didn't you come in?

MINERVA
I never enters 'the office' on Sunday. Bad Juju.

(CONTINUED)

189 CONTINUED: 189

JOHN
I still have questions.

MINERVA
You know all you needs to know for now. One thang: Don't commune wif the dead so long you forgit the livin'.

Then she starts to walk away, down a dirt road. Before she disappears, she turns.

MINERVA
I loves you, boy. But I ain't the only one. You knows that don'tcha?

190 EXT. SWEET GEORGIA BROWN'S ALLEY - NIGHT 190

Mandy and Joe exit, lock up and spot... John, leaning against his Oldsmobile. *

JOHN
How was opening night?

JOE
Full house except for one, reserved, empty table.

JOHN
Sorry. I just --

JOE
-- Forgiven, but don't let it happen again.

Joe, sensing a private moment, kisses Mandy on the cheek and walks away.

JOE
'Night, ya'll.

John and Mandy look at one another.

JOHN
I, uh, was wondering if you'd like to get a cup of coffee?

MANDY
Business... or pleasure? *

(CONTINUED)

190 CONTINUED: 190

John smiles. This time it's "pleasure." She considers his offer, then walks past him to the other side of the car and lets herself in. *

DISSOLVE TO:

191 INT. JOHN'S NEW APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY 191

INSERT - "NEWMARKET HEATH" HANGING ON WALL *

John adjusts the painting to level and stares at it. Two movers carry a large box by him.

JOHN
(to movers)
That file box goes in the den.

Another MOVER, a YOUNG college guy, spots the painting and moves in for a closer look.

YOUNG MOVER
I was looking at that earlier? Is that an overpaint? *
(off John's look)
I'm studying Art History over at the college.

JOHN
Yeah, it is.

YOUNG MOVER
We've got an X-ray on campus. If you'd like we could --

JOHN
-- Thanks anyway.

YOUNG MOVER
Don't you wanna know what's underneath?

JOHN
I rather enjoy <u>not</u> knowing.

The Mover shrugs and walks toward the door for another load. He passes Mandy, who stands in the doorway. *

MANDY (O.S.)
How long's your lease?

John walks over.

(CONTINUED)

191 CONTINUED: 191

JOHN
A year.
(kisses her)
With an option to purchase.

MANDY
Welcome to Savannah. You hungry?

192 EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY 192

John and Mandy exit the house, hand in hand. John stops and shakes his head when he sees...

Chablis, in a smart fall outfit, on the sidewalk, picnic basket in one hand and a leash holding Uga with the other.

CHABLIS
Uh-huh, that's right, John -- The Lady is chaperonin'!

Uga gets away from her and trots over to John. He reluctantly takes the leash.

JOHN
Just like your Mama said, Frank -- 'Two tears in a bucket...'

NEW ANGLE

The foursome -- John, Mandy, Chablis, Uga -- make their way down the sidewalk toward the Big Park. Mr. Glover and "Patrick" join in the parade.

We PAN TO -- Minerva on her bench in the park, smiling as she watches them walk away. Flavius, the squirrel, makes his way down a tree and jumps up beside her. She stares at him for a second, then reaches in her bag and gives him a peanut. Flavius, thankful, tears into his meal.

193 EXT. NEW BONAVENTURE - BILLY'S GRAVE - DAY 193

The fifth of Wild Turkey, almost empty, sits on the marker.

194 EXT. OLD BONAVENTURE - DAY 194

Jim's monument. We PAN TO the adjacent family plot -- the memorial statue of the little girl that opened the movie. Still kind, still displaced. *

(CONTINUED)

194 CONTINUED: 194

The bird dishes now seem to remind us of the scales of justice.

A PIPE ORGAN rendition of FRANCK'S "Piece Heroique" bellows then shifts to "I Got Rhythm" as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END